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The self-reported content and function of religious and spiritual beliefs :: a grounded theory.

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THE SELF-REPORTED CONTENT AND FUNCTION OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL BELIEFS: A GROUNDED THEORY

A Thesis Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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Psychologists have traditionally believed that religiosity is related to psychopathology. A further misconception is that religion is a subjective matter unfit for scientific investigation. These beliefs are challenged by empirical evidence that has demonstrated that religion can have positive or negative effects. The research on the psychology of religion has focused primarily on delineating dimensions of religion and examining correlations between these dimensions and psychological functioning. This dimensional research has considered religion from a global, relatively undifferentiated perspective. A research strategy that considers more differentiated facets of religion, such as practice, experience, and beliefs, as separate entities may enable a more refined understanding of how religion affects the individual. This study was designed to enable such work, by developing an inductive theory concerning the content and function of religious beliefs.

Eight individual and 5 group interviews were conducted with 22 female and 6 male undergraduates. The data from these interviews was analyzed to induce a grounded theory of the content and function of religious beliefs. Seven major content

domains were suggested by the data: (a) beliefs about a higher power, (b) beliefs about creation, (c) beliefs about the soul, (d) beliefs about life after death, (e) beliefs concerning one's connection with others, (f) beliefs about fate, and (g) beliefs about supernatural occurrences. Many of these domains were further divided into subdomains reflecting themes that appeared relevant to the overall domain. Function domains were described for each of the content domains, as well as for belief systems as a whole. Previous theoretical and empirical works were reevaluated in light of the results obtained here. Future research directions are suggested.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Relatively little serious attention has been paid to the psychology of religion in the past few decades, although in recent years this has begun to change (Bergin, 1991). Western psychologists have traditionally linked religion with various detrimental effects on mental health, and have avoided the study of it because religion was considered a non-scientific subject (Argyle, 1985; Bergin, 1983, 1991; Chance, 1988; Ellis, 1980; Flakoll, 1977; Shafranske & Gorusch, 1984; Spilka, 1986; Vergote, 1985; Watson, Morris & Hood, 1988a). Most psychologists seem to share Ellis's view that: "religiosity is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance...the less religious [people] are, the more emotionally healthy they will be" (Ellis, 1980, p. 637). Though this may be the common opinion, research contradicts it. Bergin's (1983) meta-analysis of studies relating religiosity to some measure of mental health found that only 23% demonstrated a negative relationship. In fact, twice as many studies (47%) indicated a positive relationship. There is also evidence that religious involvement is negatively correlated with social difficulties such as sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, and delinquency (Bergin, 1983), and survey data show that people who are church-affiliated are happier and more satisfied with their marriages, careers, and lives in general (Spilka, 1986).

Although research supports the positive effect of religion, most psychologists retain a bias, often viewing religion as contributing to

neurosis, causing pathological guilt or maintaining a dependent, narcissistic state (Chance, 1988; Spilka, 1986; Watson et al. 1988a). In addition, religion is seen as subjective and metaphysical, and inquiry into religion is thus viewed by many as a speculative as opposed to empirical endeavor (Fromm, 1950; Shafranske & Gorusch, 1984). Fromm (1950) points out that whereas once man's inner life was the primary subject of thought and reason, reason is now seen as a tool to control men and objects:

> ...the tradition in which psychology was a study of the soul concerned with man's virtue and happiness was abandoned. Academic psychology, trying to imitate the natural sciences and laboratory methods of weighing and counting, dealt with everything except the soul....Psychology thus became a science lacking its main subject matter, the soul; it was concerned with mechanisms, reaction formations, instincts, but not with the most specifically human phenomenon: love, reason, conscience, values. (Fromm, 1950, p. 6)

These biases are likely due to the continuing influence of Freud's views on religion (Spilka, 1986; Watson et al. 1988a).

For Freud (1964) religion was a fiction made up primarily to defend against recognition of the power of nature and fate, including death, and to compensate for the suffering and limitations which civilization required. Humanizing nature through religion created the illusion of control; if nature's forces were similar to people then one could use strategies such as pleading, bribing and appeasing to influence them. The conversion of nature into the father figure of God was a further attempt to reassure that the power would not overwhelm but would protect (Freud, 1964).

The idea that religion ultimately compensated for the suffering imposed by civilization was very important for Freud (1964). Religion provided ultimate justice, ensuring that good was rewarded and evil punished. Freud believed that religion kept people invested in the morality of civilization. However, this was not a positive investment, for religion was ultimately a lie. Freud (1964) saw religious ideas as poorly substantiated with no factual or historical foundation that could prove or disprove the doctrine. To Freud, religious beliefs were essentially wish fulfillments and illusions. Because they had no rational foundation, religious ideas could not stand up under close scrutiny and thus an integral part of religious teaching was not to question. This teaching and the idea that morality was dependent on religion constituted Freud's major objections to it.

Freud's view was that religion taught people not to question, and thus denied rational growth, contributing instead to the power of passion or instinct. As Freud saw critical thinking as the quintessential achievement of humans, religion was a great evil:

> Think of the depressing contrast between the radiant intelligence of a healthy child and the feeble intelligence of the average adult. Can we be quite certain that it is not precisely religious education which bears a large share of the blame for this relative atrophy?...When a man has once brought himself to accept uncritically all the absurdities that religious doctrines put before him and even to overlook the contradictions between them, we need not be greatly surprised at the weakness of his intellect. But we have no other means of controlling our instinctual nature but our intelligence. How can we expect people who are under the dominance of

> prohibition of thought to attain the psychological ideal, the primacy of intelligence? (Freud, 1964, p. 77-78)

The fact that morality was dependent on this unthinking attitude made religion even more objectionable to Freud. If ethics relied upon belief in God, then a decline in religious beliefs would lead to a decline in ethical standards. Morality was better linked to rationality in Freud's view, especially as he predicted a decline in religious thinking resulting from humanity's maturing past the point of needing the illusions, much as the child matures beyond childhood illusions:

> Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father. If this view is right, it is to be supposed that a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of a process of growth. (Freud, 1964, p. 70-71)

Unless this turning-away was accompanied by teaching critical thinking and linking morality to rationality then a decline in ethics would accompany religion's waning (Freud, 1964).

It is obvious that Freud's negative view of religion has been integrated into mainstream psychology. His linking religion to neurosis is well known and is likely responsible for the prevailing view that religiosity is correlated with psychopathology. His conviction that religion was directly opposed to rationality contributes to the notion that religion is not a fit subject for rational scrutiny or research. But Freud was not the only theorist to approach the subject of religion. Others including Jung and Fromm

examined the subject from a psychological stance, but without reaching the decidedly negative conclusions drawn by Freud.

Jung (1938) saw religion as a manifestation of the collective unconscious. Basic religious phenomena were based in the archetypes existing in the unconscious. Just as the psyche truly existed, albeit in a non-physical form, religious phenomena existed and affected people without their conscious volition. For Jung, religion "seizes and controls the human subject, which is always its victim rather than its creator" (Jung, 1938, p. 4). The basic religious experience was then given meaning and interpretations by the person experiencing it; this became the religious creed. This creed was often mistaken for the religion itself, but the creed actually replaced the genuine religious experience, defending against the seeming madness of the experience by surrounding it with doctrine and ritual. For Jung, it was not the religious experience that was neurotic, but the *denial* of the experience. Jung saw the genuine religious experience as a positive force that enabled people to better integrate all parts of themselves.

> Religion is a relationship to the highest or strongest value, be it positive or negative. The relationship is voluntary as well as involuntary, that is, you can accept, consciously, the value by which you are possessed unconsciously. The psychological fact which is the greatest power in your system is the god, since it is always the overwhelming psychic factor which is called god. (Jung, 1938, p. 98)

Acceptance of the experience of God could lead to acceptance of oneself at the core of being.

Thus, Jung viewed religion as a conscious manifestation of an experience originating in the unconscious and formalized in order to make sense of it. If this formalization led to a loss and denial of the original experience then it became a negative force, but if it was accepted and explored then it could be positive, creating meaning and beauty for the individual (Jung, 1938).

Fromm (1950) also saw religion as having the potential for positive or negative effects. He defined religion as "any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion" (p. 21). To him, religion was not inherently good or bad, but could be either depending on the contents of a given religion and the effect it had on believers:

> "By their fruits shall ye know them." If religious teachings contribute to the growth, strength, freedom, and happiness of their believers, we see the fruits of love. If they contribute to the constriction of human potentialities, to unhappiness and lack of productivity, they cannot be born of love, regardless of what the dogma intends to convey. (Fromm, 1950, p. 64)

Religion that constricted strength and freedom was called authoritarian while religion that supported strength, freedom, and growth was termed humanistic (Fromm, 1950).

Authoritarian religion was seen by Fromm (1950) as generally unhealthy for the individual. In this type, a higher power existed outside the self and was entitled to worship and obedience. The aim of this type of religion was to surrender to the power beyond man's capabilities. Lack of proper reverence for this power was a sin, and

obedience was essential. In an authoritarian religion, man was believed to be powerless and insignificant; only through God could he be strong. Thus, man projected the best parts of himself onto God; as God became better, man became more powerless and empty, alienating himself from himself:

> The more he praises God, the emptier he becomes. The emptier he becomes, the more sinful he feels. The more sinful he feels, the more he praises God--and the less able he is to regain himself. (Fromm, 1950, p. 51)

This alienation from the self inevitably led to a dependence on God and a lack of faith in the self. The lack of faith was generalized to all humans and to the power of reasoning. This is similar to Freud's view that religion undermines rational thinking. The eventual outcome of this process was a secular-holy split where the secular was seen as worthless because it was without love and trust. But the holy was unobtainable and demanded the sacrifice of self. It was Fromm's (1950) view that any religion became authoritarian when it allied itself with secular power, as the aim then became obedience and submission.

While authoritarian religion seems generally self-defeating, humanistic religion presents a much more positive outlook (Fromm, 1950). In this type of religion, the goal was for man to develop his own strength and reason in order to understand himself in relation to others and his position in the universe. Internal strength rather than powerlessness, and self-realization rather than obedience were stressed.

Fromm (1950) saw many similarities between therapy and religion. The therapist may choose to address the social malady or the internal cure of the soul. For Fromm, addressing the social malady was akin to authoritarian religion, while curing the soul was humanistic. He saw truth stemming from critical self-examination as inseparably linked to freedom and independence in both religion and therapy. Thus, humanistic religion and therapy both allowed freedom by encouraging the quest for truth, while authoritarian religion denied freedom by equating questions and doubt with rebellion and sin. Fromm described three qualities that humanistic religion and therapy shared:

> One aspect of religious experience is the wondering, the marveling, the becoming aware of life and one's own existence, and of the puzzling problem of one's relatedness to the world....Another quality of religious experience is...an ultimate concern with the meaning of life, with the self-realization of man, with the fulfillment of the task which life sets us....[the third quality is] an attitude of oneness not only in oneself but with all life and beyond that, with the universe. (Fromm, 1950, p. 94-95)

Thus, for Fromm, religion could be a healthy force, akin to psychotherapy in its effects on the individual. His view was that religion and psychology were not antithetical but rather synergetic in helping people achieve their full potentials.

More recently, object relations theorists have been examining the psychology of religion and drawing conclusions that reflect the possibility of a positive force in religion. Object relations theory emphasizes the development of the self in the context of

interpersonal relationships. A child's interactions are motivated by the need to be related and the need to develop an individuated self within this relational context. Representations of self-object relations are internalized and act as templates which are projected onto the environment as fantasies and expectations (DeFant,1986). Thus, psychologists such as Erikson, Winicott and McDargh focused on the relationship aspects of religious beliefs and rituals: "Religions appear to express a need for a relationship with something beyond oneself." (DeFant, 1986 p. 10). Erikson viewed religion as related to issues of parental faith and basic trust. He pointed to the themes of surrender, admission of misdeeds and appeals in religion as supporting this hypothesis. Erikson saw religion as a socially acceptable way to reenact themes of early development; an example is conceptualizing salvation rituals as a means by which a person achieves symbolic rapprochement with the frustrating mother (Erikson, 1950).

McDargh (1983) argued that the core of religious experience is a faith stemming from early object relations and the development of a sense of self. Faith is related to the affective tone of early object relations. Religious faith was seen as the relationship between the individual and a transcendent or ultimate reality (McDargh, 1983). McDargh stated that one motivation for this relationship is the threat of self-dissolution that accompanies the experience of the ultimate limit. This motivation sees religion as a response to human limitations and the fear of death or the destruction of the self. This fear was compared to with the fear generated by the idea of abandonment by the mothering figure in object relations (DeFant,

1986). Because God is seen as infinite, a relationship with God means never being abandoned to the foreseen consequences. Another motivation stems from the yearning for communion with reality and connection with the world at large:

> The first reason involves the experience of absolute limit which inevitably confronts the integrity of the self with the threat of dissolution. The second reason for the lure of the transcendent, by contrast, derives from the human yearning for communion with more and more reality. It is an experience, we might say, of transcendence proceeding from the fullness of living, as opposed to transcendence at the bounds of possibility. (McDargh, 1983, p. 108)

Winicott focused on the role of religion as a transitional object. A transitional object is defined as an external object to which the individual develops a strong attachment. This attachment allows the child to maintain a sense of security, continuity, omnipotence and a stable sense of self. The object is not experienced as wholly separate from the self. Transitional objects are not only needed by children, but are also used by adults to maintain a level of intermediate experiencing that is the middle ground between the objective and the subjective (DeFant, 1986). Winicott viewed religious experiences as existing in this intermediate domain between inner psychic reality and external objects. Religion was thus seen as an advanced transitional object: "The mature adult uses religion to negotiate an everpresent, awesome sense of separateness while maintaining a connection to the world" (DeFant, 1986 p. 36). It is not the actual existence of a God that is important, but rather the experience of the relationship, of communication and connection with this higher

power. Religion is not the only way in which to address these issues; other cultural activities may play the role of the transitional object, but religion is especially well suited for this purpose, due to its content (DeFant, 1986).

Guntrip (1969) argued convincingly for the idea that the motivation for religion is the need for relatedness:

> The finding of present-day "object relations theory" is that personal integration is a function of growth in the medium of loving personal relationships....religion is pre-eminently an experience of personal relationship, which extends the "personal" interpretation of experiences to the *n*th degree, to embrace both man and his universe in one meaningful whole. (Guntrip, 1969, p. 325)

He agreed with McDargh (1983) that the motivation towards religion is a desire for connectedness, and a defense against dissolution through isolation (Guntrip, 1969). Guntrip emphasized the isolation of individuals, likening it to a child who grows up in a bad environment. This child develops with fears, hate and guilt and feels disconnected, isolated and alone in the world, developing a schizoid condition. What is missing from this child's development is the relatedness to others that would allow personal integration and positive feelings (Guntrip, 1969) For Guntrip, religion addressed the isolation of human beings and defended against that schizoid condition:

> Today, psychodynamic science is showing us another kind of order, not material, but personal, the way the human infant grows in the medium of intimate personal relationships, to develop stable, mature loving personhood. I suggest that this is the key to *that still wider-ranging experience that human history has called*

> *"religion," a way of experiencing the universe that does not condemn us all to meaningless schizoid isolation,* but relates us to a personal heart of reality, that we refer to be the indefinable term "God." (Guntrip, 1969, p. 331)

Freud, Jung, Fromm and object relations theorists all created theories of religion from observation and intuition. While Freud viewed religion as inherently negative, Fromm, Jung and the object relations school saw some benefit to be gained from religious ideas and investigating the experience of religion. One thing to keep in mind when evaluating both theory and research on the psychology of religion is the Judeo-Christian bias of the theorists and researchers. This is especially true for Freud's work, and also for the vast majority of empirical research on the psychology of religion. This bias may be partially responsible for the negative stereotyping of religion, as these religions are commonly seen as hierarchical, and some may even encourage the suspension of critical scrutiny to which Freud objects. However, even research reflecting this Judeo-Christian bias supports the idea that religion can have positive as well as negative effects. The recent work of Allport and others on the various dimensions of religion and religious experience reflects the Judeo-Christian bias while supporting the mixed effects of religion.

Allport's (1950) original conceptualization was that mature religious sentiment consisted of 6 major attributes:

1. It is well-differentiated. The mature person is aware of the complexity of religion and involved in a continuous re-examination of their religion.

2. It is dynamic in character. Although faith may have sprung from an earlier drive it has since been transformed into a master motive.

3. It directs a consistent morality.

4. It is comprehensive in that it will raise the main questions of life. Allport sees tolerance as essential to this aspect.

5. It is integrated with life in general and not disassociated from other aspects of the world.

6. It is fundamentally heuristic. An individual with a mature religion can tolerate uncertainty and hold a belief in suspension until it is confirmed or modified; commitment is possible without surety.

From this original conceptualization sprang the dimension of intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity (Allport, 1950; Allport & Ross, 1967):

> Persons with this orientation [extrinsic] are disposed to use religion for their own ends. The term is borrowed from axiology, to designate an interest that is held because it serves other, more ultimate interests. Extrinsic values are always instrumental and utilitarian. Persons with this orientation may find religion useful in a variety of ways--to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs. In theological terms the extrinsic type turns to God, but without turning away from self.
>
> Persons with this orientation [intrinsic] find their master motive in religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance, and they are, so far as possible, brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and prescriptions. Having embraced a creed the individual endeavors to internalize and follow it fully. It is in this sense that he *lives* his religion. (Allport & Ross, 1967, p. 434)

What distinguishes Allport's theoretical views on religion from those of Freud, Jung, Fromm and object relations theorists is the empirical research that Allport's conceptualization initiated. The intrinsic-extrinsic concept was operationalized first by Wilson (1960), and then better refined by Feagin (1964). Allport and Ross (1967) used some of Feagin's items to operationalize the intrinsic-extrinsic dimension with a scale consisting of twenty items. This scale, the Religious Orientation Scale, includes questions such as "I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life"; "If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, I attend church at least once a week or oftener, two or three times a month, once every month or two, rarely"; "What religion offers most is comfort when sorrow and misfortune strike" (Hunt & King, 1977). This scale has been used in a considerable amount of research on the components of the intrinsic-extrinsic orientations as well as the correlated personality attributes and the relation to mental health and sickness (Allport & Ross, 1967; Hunt & King, 1977; Watson et al., 1988a, 1988b). The intrinsic-extrinsic conceptualization has also inspired a general investigation into the various possible dimensions of religion (Brown & Forgas, 1980; King, 1967; King & Hunt, 1975; Fleck, 1976; Weima, 1986; Wicklin, 1990). Wicklin (1990) points out that there are 3 basic approaches to measuring the dimensions of religion: (a) dividing religion into cognitive, affective and behavioral components; (b) exploring religion from a developmental approach; (c) focusing on an overall approach to religion, rather than on an analysis of components. Most researcher's seem to have followed Allport's lead by choosing the overall approach, although there are notable

exceptions such as James's (1902) work on the varieties of religious experience and Fowler's (1981) developmental work.

Allport originally conceived of intrinsic-extrinsic as one dimension, with the two concepts existing at opposite ends of a continuum. However, further research into the scale showed that intrinsic and extrinsic are separate concepts (Hunt & King, 1977) that may actually contain several dimensions. Hunt and King delineated eleven categories present in the definitions of intrinsic and extrinsic that consist of several different components. The five categories that they described as most important are (Hunt & King, 1977):

1. Universal vs. parochial. Intrinsic religiosity is more universal. It contains an ethical character including ideals of brotherhood. Extrinsic religiosity is parochial; it tends to be exclusionistic and ethnocentric.

2. Unselfish vs. selfish. Intrinsic religiosity is not self-centered. It aims to transcend selfish needs. Extrinsic religiosity is very self-serving, with an attitude of protecting one's own ends.

3. Relevance for life. Intrinsic religiosity is integrated into thought and conduct; it gives meaning and motivation to life. Extrinsic religiosity is not integrated, but compartmentalized, creating a split between the secular and the holy (much like the split in Fromm's authoritarian religion).

4. Ultimate vs. instrumental. Intrinsic religiosity is an end in itself. Persons with an intrinsic orientation are intent on serving their religion and view religion as the master motive. Extrinsic religiosity is more utilitarian; it is used to support and serve non-religious needs.

5. Associational vs. communal. Persons with an intrinsic orientation are seeking deeper values and a true religious fellowship. Extrinsically oriented persons use religion for political, social or communal identification. Religion provides them with status and social outlets.

Other research on the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction has focused on identifying personality, behavioral and mental health aspects correlated with the different types of religiosity. Extrinsic orientation has been shown to be positively correlated with prejudice (Allport & Ross, 1967), dogmatism and fear of death (Wicklin, 1990), as well as guilt associated with depression (Watson, Morris and Hood, 1988b). Intrinsic religion, on the other hand, is associated with less prejudicial attitudes (Allport & Ross, 1967), internal locus of control and purpose in life (Wicklin, 1190), introspection resulting in positive conscience and empathy (Watson et al., 1988a), and God's forgiveness of sin resulting in lowered depression (Watson et al., 1988b).

The intrinsic-extrinsic conceptualization is the paradigm most extensively used and researched, but other models have been proposed to describe the dimensions of religion. One that is closely related to Allport's is Allen and Spilka's (1967) committed and consensual religion. Like Allport's, this conceptualization differentiates between religion as an integrated life commitment and religion as a formal, socialized response, but restricts the definition of religion to include only the cognitive dimensions. Their study reveals five structural components (Allen & Spilka, 1967):

1. Content. Committed religiosity is abstract and relational in content, using philosophical ideas. Consensual religiosity is more concrete and specific, using observable referents and more literal statements.

2. Clarity. Committed religiosity has a coherent structure of beliefs, providing the ability to answer questions and express ideas in a clear and exact way. Consensual religiosity gives vague or non-referential answers, generalizing and often using subjective impressions.

3. Complexity. Committed religiosity is composed of a large number of categories and ideas that are complex and detailed. Consensual religiosity has only a few ideas that tend to be globalized, with repeated references to a single concept; ideas seem to be based on diametrical opposites.

4. Flexibility. Committed religiosity is more candid and open with a greater tolerance for diversity. People with a committed orientation are more apt to thoughtfully examine different opinions and beliefs. Consensual religiosity tends to be restricted, narrowing religion by rejecting, distorting or screening out differing opinions and beliefs.

5. Importance. Committed religiosity is of central attention and is integrated into daily activities. Consensual religiosity is detached, apart from daily experience and emotional commitment.

Many of these components correspond to aspects of the intrinsic-extrinsic dimensions. In fact, Fleck (1976) points out that there is considerable overlap between intrinsic orientation and committed religion, although not as much between extrinsic and

consensual. He proposes three basic orientations to religion in order to incorporate all aspects: (a) committed or intrinsic religion which would reflect a high degree of perspective, flexibility, openness and commitment; (b) consensual religion where religion is seen as a personality support or haven for personal comfort characterized by a shallow and restrictive mode of thinking resulting in a simple conformist orientation including steady, routine participation in institutionalized religious beliefs and practices; (c) extrinsic religion where religious membership and participation are used for social and status purposes (Fleck, 1976). This model differentiates compliance for personal gain from compliance for emotional support.

The third major model of religious dimensions comes from Batson (reviewed in Weima, 1986; Wicklin, 1990). Batson objected to Allport's intrinsic-extrinsic dimension, on the grounds that it omitted the elements of complexity, flexibility and tentativeness originally integral to Allport's definition of mature religion (Wicklin, 1990). Thus, Batson proposed a third factor, which he called quest, to measure the extent to which religion involves an ongoing dialogue with questions raised by the contradictions and pain of life (Weima, 1986; Wicklin, 1990). This dimension may also address religious conflict and personal distress (Wicklin, 1990). Although Batson's addition makes conceptual sense, the operationalization of it has been shown to have poor reliability and little support has been generated for its being truly distinct from the intrinsic dimension (Weima, 1986; Wicklin, 1990).

Other studies have approached the question of religious orientation through less pre-defined methods, not assuming that

there were specific theoretically-driven dimensions. King (1967) reviewed relevant literature for possible dimensions and constructed a questionnaire concerning various aspects of belief and religious involvement. Factor and cluster analyses led to his proposing nine dimensions of religion: (a) creedal assent and personal commitment, (b) participation in congregational activity, (c) personal religious experience, (d) personal relationships in the congregation, (e) commitment to the intellectual search despite doubt, (f) openness to religious growth and questioning, (g) dogmatism and extrinsic orientation, (h) financial support of the church and attitude toward this, (i) talking and reading about religion. A national replication of this study affirmed most of these dimensions, adding two others pertaining to the salience and integration of religious behaviors and beliefs into daily life (King & Hunt, 1975).

Brown and Forgas (1980) also investigated the elements of religion. Instead of using people affiliated with a particular religion, they used psychology students and asked them to describe concepts or elements they naturally associated with religion. The most common elements (33), such as faith, experiences of God, belief in Heaven, church attendance, and having a sense of purpose in life, were rated on 16 semantic differential scales. Using multi-dimensional scaling, Brown and Forgas (1980) found three dimensions within these ratings which they labelled:

1. Institutional-individual. This relates to the degree to which religion is a personal experience as opposed to an institutionalized experience.

2. Positive-negative. This relates to the warmth perceived, and differentiates humane and unorthodox aspects of religion from punishing, orthodox aspects.

3. Known-unknown and tangible-intangible. This dimension differentiates worldly aspects of religion that are mediated by the church from unworldly, transcendental or mystical aspects that were more personal and uncommon.

While the research reviewed above has focused on describing religion, other researchers have investigated and theorized on the function of religion. Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985) applied attribution theory to religion in order to explain the function of religious explanations. Attribution theory states that people make attributions for three reasons: (a) to make something meaningful, (b) from a need to predict or control events, or (c) to protect, maintain or enhance one's self-esteem or self-concept. Spilka et al. (1985) propose that religious concepts offer meaning-enhancing explanations such as it is God's will that one suffers or is rewarded, if one is good one will eventually reach heaven, and so forth. These explanations also enhance control, e.g. prayer or church affiliation in order to influence God, and maintain self-esteem, e.g. believing or participating in rituals makes one a good person. Although events that are attributed to religious causes such as misfortunes or rewards may also be attributed to naturalistic causes (e.g. taking care of one's health, or working hard to achieve something), Spilka et al. (1985) propose that one makes religious attributions because of the context and expectations, personal attributes and socialization, and demands of the situation. Spilka (1989) went on to apply this theory

to an explanation of functional versus dysfunctional religion. Functional religion is religion that supports human potential, freedom or development and enhances feelings of control, whereas dysfunctional religion is more dogmatic, restricting thought, freedom and opportunity (this appears similar to Fromm's authoritarian/humanistic split). Spilka (1989) believes that dysfunctional attributions distort reality, separate people and arouse fear and uncertainty. This conceptualization seems to be associated with the dichotomous dimensions of religion that Allport (1967), Allen and Spilka (1967) and others have investigated. Brown (1985), in his review of research on social attitudes and religion, agrees that religion interacts with beliefs about social and moral control (control-enhancing attributions), and offers a social identity (meaning-enhancing attributions).

In contrast to the strategy of investigating religion from the general stance which approaches religion as a whole, some researchers have used Wicklin's (1990) second approach, investigating religion from a developmental view point. Fowler (1981) developed a stage theory of religion, delineating stages of faith through which individuals progress in their religious development. The work of Perry (1970) is also relevant from a developmental viewpoint and shows some similarities to the dimensions discussed above. Perry investigated the variety of ways in which students experienced and adapted to being exposed to relativism. He felt that exposure to relativism affected not only his subjects who were college students at a pluralistic university, but also the population at large as the increased mobility of the modern

world and the influence of mass media expose the general population to the diversity of experience and culture in the world (Perry, 1970). Perry developed a stage theory addressing how individuals progress from a dualistic position, to an acceptance of the relativism inherent in the world and an adaptive stance including self-defining Commitments.

Perry's (1970) theory includes nine stages of intellectual and ethical development:

Position 1: Basic Duality. The world is seen in polar terms of we-right-good versus other-wrong-bad. Absolute answers exist which are known to Authority whose role is to teach them.

Position 2: Multiplicity Pre-Legitimate. The individual perceives diversity of opinion and uncertainty but attributes these things to unwarranted confusion in poorly organized Authority or as exercises set by authority to encourage individuals to discover the right answer themselves.

Position 3: Multiplicity Subordinate. Individuals accept diversity and uncertainty, but only as a temporary state in areas where Authority has not yet found the Truth.

Position 4: Multiplicity Correlate or Relativism Subordinate.

a. Multiplicity Correlate. Uncertainty and diversity of opinion is perceived and elevated to a philosophy where "everyone has a right to their own opinion."

b. Relativism Subordinate. Individuals discover qualitative relativistic reasoning as a special case of what the Authority wants, understanding the idea that the Authority desires them to think in a particular *way* as opposed to thinking particular

things. Dualism still exists as there is a right and a wrong way to think.

Position 5: Relativism Correlate, Competing or Diffuse. This is a stage of revolution in thinking. The world is perceived as broadly relativistic but there is no focusing element of individual relevance as there is in later stages. The personal or social implications of relativism have not yet been confronted. Relativism Correlate and Relativism Competing have unsolved elements of transition, whereas Relativism Diffuse is more generalized relativism where all knowledge is perceived as relative.

Position 6: Commitment Foreseen. The individual comes to realize on some level that a sense of identity requires some continuity. If all knowledge and values are contingent on context than one is threatened with a loss of identity. In order to protect one's identity, one recognizes the need to orient oneself in the relativistic world through some form of personal Commitment. Commitment refers to an act or activity which relates an individual as a willful force to aspects of his or her life in which energy and care is invested and generates meaning for the individual. This Commitment is distinct from unquestioning or unevaluated belief.

Position 7: Initial Commitment. The individual makes an initial Commitment in some area of his or her life. This involves defining oneself and one's values in some area of life.

Position 8: Orientation in Implications of Commitment. In position seven, the individual has not yet confronted the implications of his or her choice. In this position, the individual confronts these

implications and explores the subjective and stylistic issues of responsibility for his or her choice.

Position 9: Developing Commitment(s). The individual experiences an affirmation of identity among multiple responsibilities and choices and realizes Commitment(s) as an ongoing process where he or she may express his or her self.

Perry explicitly describes the relationship of the revolution in thinking in position five to religious beliefs:

> Theologically speaking, Position 5 represents the point of critical division between "belief" and the possibility of "faith." Belief requires no investment by the person. To become faith it must first be doubted. Only in the face of doubt is the person called upon for that act of Commitment that is his contribution, his faith. In Position 5 one can no longer "believe" in the simple unquestioned sense.
>
> If one later commits oneself to a faith in the Absolute, there is a criterion which reveals that this commitment has been made in the context of a relativistic world. This criterion is one's attitude toward other people with a belief or a faith in a different Absolute. They cannot appear as alien, other than human; one must, paradoxically, respect them. (Perry, 1970, p. 131)

It may be seen that aspects of Perry's stages are also found in the research on the dimensions of religion described above. For example, Allport's (1950) inclusion of the need for tolerance of uncertainty and commitment without surety as part of mature religious sentiment may be seen in Perry's criterion for religious belief after the acceptance of relativism as mature thinking. Similarly Hunt and King's (1977) category of universal vs. parochial reflects the ideas of

relativism and tolerance for others' opinions vs. dualism and intolerance for any person who does not adhere to the "right" answer.

The studies reviewed above have considered what the general concept of religion encompasses and what its purpose is and explored some developmental ideas about religion. Defining the different religious orientations and using these to investigate religion's relationship with other variables has added to an understanding of how religious beliefs and participation may affect prejudicial attitudes (Allen & Spilka, 1967; Allport & Ross, 1967) and how various aspects of religion may affect mental health (e.g. Watson et al., 1988a, 1988b). But these conceptualizations (intrinsic-extrinsic, committed-consensual, quest) and developmental theories examine religion from a global perspective and encompass many terms that may have different meanings for different people. Hunt & King (1977) point out that although the intrinsic-extrinsic conceptualization has been researched and used relatively extensively, it is still unclear what, exactly, intrinsic or extrinsic refers to. The concepts seem to encompass behavior, thought, experience and function of religious phenomenon, but it is unclear in what ways they apply to each of these. It has been suggested (Hunt & King, 1977) that the most likely answer is that the intrinsic-extrinsic concept refers to a personality variable that applies to areas other than religion. If this is so, then further research is warranted as the intrinsic-extrinsic personality orientation could then be used to understand and predict behavior in general (Hunt & King, 1977). However, we are still left with questions concerning the specific

parameters of religion and the function it serves. One way to address these questions is to make use of the first research approach suggested by Wicklin (1990), namely, to divide religion into cognitive, affective and behavioral components and then examine the content and function of each of these components separately.

Some researchers have applied this methodology to religious experiences. James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) was an important early contribution to the psychology of religion. James investigated the content of people's experiences and created categories of experience to describe this content. James deliberately sought out intense experiences, assuming that the distinct features of different experiences would be more clearly discerned in these exaggerated states. To James (1902), religion served important personal needs, opening people to deeper aspects of their personalities and allowing them to integrate these aspects.

Moehle (1983) investigated religious experiences with a more objective, less anecdotal method. She collected descriptions of personal religious experiences from students and adults and applied multi-dimensional scaling to investigate how religious experiences are perceived and defined. This descriptive study found several dimensions of experience for both students and adults. For students, Moehle (1983) found four dimensions:

1. Spiritual-temporal, This reflects to what degree an experience is church-related and traditionally spiritual as opposed to being more concerned with personal achievement, beauty and less traditionally religious phenomena.

2. Aesthetic response. This involves the extent to which an experience consists of awe through natural or created beauty.

3. Interactive. This reflects the extent to which the experience involves interaction with other people.

4. Isolated-continuous. This reflects the extent to which the experience is an isolated event (e.g. a mystical vision) as opposed to a continuous experience (e.g. experiencing the feeling that God is watching over) and the extent to which the experience provides comfort in life; continuous experiences tended to provide more comfort.

Moehle found slightly different dimensions of experience for self-defined religious adults:

1. Spiritual-temporal. This dimension is very similar to the students'.

2. Interactive. This is similar as well, but also reflects the degree to which feelings in the experience are attributed to oneself or to features of the situation; experiences with little interpersonal contact were rated as more dispositional.

3. Control. This dimension reflects the extent to which control over events was a part of the experience, and the type of contact with God experiences (e.g. contact with God through prayer, or contact with God through visions). Events lower in control seemed to involve greater contact with God and more uncommon or miraculous events.

Moehle concludes that religious experiences are experienced differently by different individuals and suggests further research on the meaning and function of these experiences.

There is obviously a limited amount of empirical work available on the content and function of religious experience as evidenced by the 80 year lapse between the work of James and that of Moehle. There appears to be even less on the content and function of religious beliefs. Hastings and Hoge (1986) did a longitudinal study on religious attitudes and their change over time. They defined beliefs with traditional doctrine and religious affiliation, e.g. "The nature of the deity [is] an infinitely omnipotent creator"; "The person of Christ [is] the human incarnation of God" (Hastings & Hoge, 1986, p. 374). They state that the trends in religious beliefs reflect trends in broader values; traditional religious commitment is stronger in times of conservative political, social and moral values and weakest in times of liberal attitudes (Hastings & Hoge, 1986). From 1948 to 1967 there was a societal increase in liberal values and individualism and a concomitant decrease in religious commitment. Little change occurred from 1967 to 1974. From 1974 to 1984 there was an increase in conservatism both morally and religiously but this trend was accompanied by a growing privatism with less concern about broader social and political issues, including developing a religious philosophy of life (Hastings & Hoge, 1986). This study is important in that it points out that religious beliefs and attitudes take place in a social context (C. Carrington, personal communication, March, 1990; Hastings & Hoge, 1986). However, this study sheds little light on the actual content or function of religious beliefs, as it assumes religious affiliation and traditional doctrinal statements to define belief.

Kivley (1988) theorizes about the content and function of healthy religious beliefs. He contends that healthy religious beliefs would encompass four areas (Kivley, 1988):

1. Relational orientation. This aspect reflects the sense of belonging to others reflected in beliefs. Healthy beliefs would connect rather than isolate people. Individuals with healthy beliefs would be able to either learn to respect the beliefs of others or to consider differences in beliefs as unimportant in terms of interpersonal interactions.

2. Positive outlook. Healthy religious beliefs would foster attitudes of love and joy, rather than fear and shame. These beliefs would encourage a basic trust in the universe and oneself, including acceptance of natural impulses and greater independence, freedom and responsibility.

3. Consistency and comprehensiveness. Healthy beliefs would lead to moral consistency and an ability to deal with both pleasure and pain.

4. Intellectual integrity. Healthy beliefs include a struggle to include all information into a world view. People with healthy religious beliefs are unafraid to question their beliefs and accept the validity of their own experience and intuition. These individuals realize that faith is a continual growth process requiring flexibility and a certain amount of tenuousness.

It can be seen that many of Kivley's ideas are similar to those of Allport (1950) and Fromm (1950), but applied specifically to beliefs. Unfortunately, these perceptions stand on no empirical foundation.

Thus, although some major contributions have been made in the psychology of religion, we are still sorely lacking basic empirical data describing what religion is and its function in the individual's life. This is true especially for religious beliefs and behaviors, although there are only a limited amount of data on religious experiences as well. Research on the dimensions of religion has contributed valuable knowledge, but may reflect the bias against religion in psychology in general, as this research seems to attempt to explain religion. This may not be the most helpful approach, as many assumptions are embedded in the models on which this research is based:

> It is well documented that many psychologists are convinced that there is a contradiction between religious beliefs and the scientific study of religion. The belief of a religious man is for them an illusion. Consequently they wish to *explain* religion, which for them is an alien behavior and belief. Mainstream psychology studies mental or psychological processes. But the psychology of religion, in order to explain religion should study process and content. In other words, it should explain religious beliefs as they exist, develop and operate. (Vergote, 1985, p. 53).

Vergote (1985) argues that to understand religion one must approach it without bias or assumptions, beginning with the actual content and process, not necessarily with psychological explanations. Spilka, Hood and Gorusch (1985) state that the major problem in the psychology of religion is the lack of an organizing theory. This lack may be related to the attempts to explain, rather than understand. Spilka et al. (1985) agree that looking within religion, and not just to

general psychological theories (such as attribution theory, Freud's theory or Allport's conceptualization of healthy religion) may better enable us to create such a model.

One question raised when approaching the psychology of religion concerns the utility of creating such a model, or of understanding the psychology of religion in the first place. Traditional theorists argue that this understanding is imperative for a general understanding of human beings. Fromm states "there is no one without a religious need, a need to have a frame of orientation and an object of devotion," (Fromm, 1950, p. 25) and goes on to outline the responsibilities of the psychologist in light of this:

> The psychologist must be keenly interested in the specific contents of religion for what matters to him is what human attitude a religion expresses and what kind of effect it has on man, whether it is good or bad for the development of man's powers. He is interested not only in an analysis of the *psychological roots* of various religions but also in their *value*. (Fromm, 1950, p. 26)

Jung (1938) also argues for the general importance of understanding religion and studying it empirically:

> The human soul seems to harbor mysteries, since to an empiricist all religious experience boils down to a particular condition of the mind. If we want to know anything about what religious experience means to those who have it, we have every chance nowadays of studying every imaginable form of it. And if it means anything, it means everything to those who have it. This is at least the inevitable conclusion one reaches by a careful study of the evidence. (Jung, 1938, p. 75)

More recently, Bergin (1991) points out that religious values affect individuals just as any other values, and an understanding of human beings necessitates an understanding of the effects of these values on behavior and self-concept. In addition, Perry's (1970) work inspires questions about the place of religion in the larger context of intellectual and ethical development and its interaction with other Commitments. Religion plays a major part in most people's lives: 94% of Americans say they believe in God or a universal spirit of some type and 9 in 10 state a particular religious preference (Gallup, 1987). In addition, 48% state that religion is increasing its influence on life; 85% say that religion is fairly or very important in their lives and 57% believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems (Gallup, 1987).

An understanding of religion is important not only from a general psychological point of view, but also from a clinical perspective. As noted before, many psychologists hold the biased opinion that religion contributes to psychopathology (Argyle, 1985; Bergin, 1983, 1991; Chance, 1988; Ellis, 1980; Shafranske & Gorusch, 1984; Spilka, 1986; Vergote, 1985; Watson, Morris & Hood, 1988a). While empirical data denies this particular conclusion, it supports the idea that religion does have some effect on mental health (Bergin, 1983, 1991; Watson et al., 1988a, 1988b). Spilka (1986) outlines 5 ways in which religion may affect mental health:

1. Religion in direct relation to psychopathology. In some cases religion may actually be an expression of psychopathology, while in others it may serve as a coping mechanism or a control of pathological expression, preventing suicide or hopelessness.

2. Religion as a socializing or suppressing agent. Religion may provide a conforming and conventional framework to socialize behavior.

3. Religion as a haven. Religious faith and affiliation may provide a refuge for some people.

4. Religion as a form of therapy. Religion may be a form of self-therapy, strengthening self-esteem and sense of control and reducing anxiety.

5. Religion as a psychological hazard. Some religious beliefs and activities may have adverse psychological effects, such as using religion as a rationale for destructive behavior (e.g. killing someone because they are a sinner).

Spilka (1986) observes that the interaction of religion and therapy could take many courses depending on the stance of both therapist and patient. If the therapist is anti-religious, or believes religion to be pathological, then he or she is less likely to be therapeutically objective. On the other hand, an accepting therapist who is knowledgeable about the psychology of religion could help the patient utilize his or her faith in a positive, therapeutic manner (Spilka, 1986). Thus, understanding the content and function of religious beliefs could enhance some therapeutic interventions with patients for whom this is an important force in their lives.

Therefore, investigation into the psychology of religion would seem to be a worthwhile endeavor on both theoretical and clinical grounds. Research thus far has made some headway, but we have yet to understand the content and function of religious beliefs which is crucial to understanding its effects on people:

> While religion has been an important analytic tool for understanding other social attitudes, and sociological theories can explain why it survives, we have not yet fully described the range of personal responses to it. To do that requires improved techniques which allow intensive explorations of the way religion is shaped for and by individuals. We should look for issues beyond convention and authority, prejudice or dogmatism or conservatism....While religion defines a unitary variable for many people, those who are deeply involved with it seldom treat it like that. (Brown, 1985, p. 168)

In order to investigate the full range of content and function of individual beliefs, a methodology is needed which does not rest on previous assumptions. The assumptions evident in past conceptualizations have also been present in the methodology chosen. Most previous research on the psychology of religion used questionnaires (with some notable exceptions, e.g. James, 1902; Moehle, 1983). The questionnaires used are normally closed-ended (Gorusch, 1990), and the questions inherently contain the bias of the researcher (Bergin, 1983; Gorusch, 1990). In addition, most of these scales have been constructed from traditional Judeo-Christian doctrine, and thus cannot encompass concepts and beliefs that fall outside of this range, such as individual systems of spirituality or Eastern systems of thought such as Buddhism (Brown, 1985). Thus, a more open-ended approach is needed, one that will allow beliefs to be elicited and explored in depth.

This study investigated the content and function of religious beliefs using a flexible method approach which allowed information to be elicited while minimizing conceptual or methodological bias.

The goal of this study was to produce a grounded theory of the self-reported content and function of religious beliefs.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects included 28 undergraduate students at the University of Massachusetts. Six females and 2 males participated in individual interviews and 16 females and 4 males participated in a total of five focus group interviews. Focus groups consisted of 3 to 6 subjects, with a mean of 4 subjects per group. Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 24, with a mean age of 20.3.[1] Subjects consisted of freshmen (2), sophomores, (8), juniors (5) and seniors (9).[1] The majority of subjects were psychology majors (11); other majors represented were communication disorders (2), education (5), design (1), pre-medical (1), fashion marketing (1), and English (1).[1] Two subjects had not yet decided on a major. Subjects' religious backgrounds included Catholicism (unspecified: 7; Roman Catholic: 6), Pentecostal (1), Christianity (unspecified: 4), Judaism (6), Shinto/Buddhism (1) and no religious background (2).[2] Subjects present affiliation with an organized religion included Catholicism (unspecified: 5; Roman Catholic: 6), Pentecostal (1), Christianity (unspecified:1), Judaism (5), and no stated affiliation (9).[2] Some of the subjects who expressed no affiliation with an organized religion went on to describe strong

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[1]This information was not available for four subjects.
[2]This information was not available for one subject.

beliefs in a personal spirituality, while others appeared to be atheistic or agnostic.

All subjects were recruited through the psychology undergraduate subject pool at the University of Massachusetts. The subject pool is composed of undergraduate students enrolled in psychology classes who are offered experimental credits for participating in research. These credits are used to receive extra credit towards their class grade. Subjects are free to choose the experiments in which they would like to participate. A folder containing an invitation to participate in a discussion about religious and spiritual views (see Appendix A) was left in the designated subject pool recruitment area in the psychology building at the university. The folder also contained specific times and dates of interviews for the subjects to sign up for. There was no attempt to assign certain types of subjects to individual or group interviews or to control group composition based on sex, year in school, age, or religious affiliation or background; subjects signed up for the interviews solely on the basis of time and date. Subjects were contacted by phone approximately one week prior to the interview time in order to remind them that they had signed up. This was done to decrease subject attrition. All subjects received two experimental credits for participating in the study. Some students may participate in experiments solely for the experimental credit they may receive, in order to improve their grades in certain classes. Thus, subjects were given their credit slips at the beginning of each interview, and offered the option to discontinue participation in the study. This was done because it was important to insure personal

investment due to the nature of the study. None of the subjects chose to leave after receiving their credit, and only one person expressed that credit was the primary motive for participating. APA guidelines for ethical recruitment and treatment of human subjects were observed, and approval of the University of Massachusetts Psychology Department Human Subjects Committee was obtained (see Appendix B for Informed Consent Forms; Appendix C for Debriefing Form).

All subjects were invited to participate in a second part of the study to be held at a later date. The purpose of this second part was explained in the initial interview as being to discuss the findings of the initial study and to solicit feedback about the resultant theory. Of the 28 subjects initially interviewed, 24 indicated that they would like to be contacted for this second part. Five of these 24 subjects agreed to participate in the follow-up group. Five other subjects could not be contacted and the 14 remaining subjects declined primarily because of previous commitments that conflicted with the offered interviewing times, although three interview times were available on two different days. Of the 5 subjects who agreed to participate, only one male and one female attended the follow-up group interview. These subjects received an additional two experimental credits for their participation in the follow-up group. A follow-up group interview with the three research assistants, two males and one female, and the primary research advisor (female) was conducted prior to the follow-up interview with the returning subjects. This was done both to elicit data for the final analysis, as well as to prepare for the interview with returning subjects. The

research assistants had been responsible for transcribing the initial interviews and were thus familiar with the content of the data.

Instruments and Procedures

There were three primary procedures for initial data collection: individual interviews, focus group interviews and interview logs written by the experimenter and the transcribers. The main rationale for using these flexible methods rather than more structured ones was the opportunity afforded for introducing unanticipated questions, clarifying ambiguities or pursuing unexpected leads through immediate follow-ups, and in-depth exploration of more complex ideas. Both individual and group interviewing were used because it was expected that each type of interview would generate different types of information thus yielding a greater amount of information overall than would have been elicited by either method alone. Individual interviewing was expected to allow some subjects to express their views in a context where social pressures and social desirability were less likely to inhibit their responses (see Greenbaum, 1988). In addition, individual interviewing allowed the interviewer to follow up on responses and elicit in-depth information. Depth in this context refers to more detailed information about topics discussed. Other individuals might have reacted to the pressure of being the single target of the official figure of the interviewer by feeling reluctant to expose their views or explore topics not initiated by the interviewer because of the pressure of being the single target of an official figure. Group interviewing has been shown to address this possible

difficulty, eliciting information from a less defended stance as the individual interacts with other members of the group in a social dynamic process and not just with the official figure of the researcher (Goldman & McDonald, 1987; Greenbaum, 1988). The group dynamic makes in-depth follow up of responses more difficult but it was expected that the interactive process would result in more breadth through the exploration of a greater variety of topics. All interviews were conducted by the primary experimenter and were tape recorded using a standard cassette recorder and an external microphone. All interviews lasted one to two hours.

Prior to the actual interviews, all subjects were invited to sign an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B). Subjects were informed that signing the form was not required, but, because of ethical requirements, continued participation depended on their signing the consent form. Subjects were reminded that the interview was being tape recorded and would then be transcribed and the tape erased. Subjects were then told that the topics of the interview were the general areas of what they believe, why they believe what they do, and what that belief means to them. It was explained that religion is a very broad term and that they should not limit themselves to anybody's definition but their own. After the first one or two interviews subjects were informed that their personal beliefs and ideas, rather than their views on organized religion or their affiliation with a church or temple, was being examined. This explanation was offered because some subjects in the first interview focused on their opinions of the effects and historical significance and

function of religious institutions and theologies, rather than the content and function of their personal beliefs.

Because a hierarchical relationship is less productive in eliciting complex, internal information, and is especially counterproductive in the context of focus groups (Goldman & McDonald, 1987), subjects were encouraged to feel that they had knowledge and insight that the interviewer was eager to receive and understand. Subjects were invited to express anything that they felt was relevant, regardless of whether it addressed a particular question. At the end of each interview, any additional information that subjects felt necessary to understand their view of the content and function of religious and spiritual beliefs was solicited. Subjects were also asked to suggest any questions or areas of inquiry for future interviews. After the first couple of interviews, subjects were asked about their experience of the interview and their reasons for participating. These questions were included in order to point toward any bias of the interviewer that might have been affecting the subjects' experience of the interview (e.g. if subjects were experiencing feelings of antagonism or rejection), bias in the subjects' views of the content area and further information about the content and function of subjects' beliefs. Finally, subjects were invited to be involved in evaluating the results of the study. Subjects who expressed interest in returning in three to five months to participate in a group session were asked to leave a phone number where they could be reached at that time. All subjects then received a written feedback notice prior to their departure (see Appendix C).

All interviews began with the very broad question "What do you believe?" The answer to this question was the primary determinant of the direction that the rest of the interview took. Though many of the same general areas were explored in all interviews, no two interviews contained exactly the same questions (see Appendix D for sample questions). Questions to follow-up on a point already made were the most common ones asked. In the first few interviews, questions reflecting themes in theology were asked if information was not volunteered (e.g what happens after you die?). Questions in later interviews reflected content and function areas brought up in previous interviews, as well as questions that previous subjects suggested.

Individual interviews were conducted in a small room, with the subject and interviewer facing each other. Subjects were encouraged to expand on the answers that they provided to specific questions. Individual interviewing allowed the interviewer more control over what subject areas were covered and pursued. In these interviews, the focus was on eliciting all information relevant to a particular question. As the interviews proceeded and content and function domains began to emerge, more specific questions addressing themes reflected in previous data were included.

The procedures used with group interviews were influenced by the works of Fern (1982), Goldman and McDonald, (1987), Griggs (1987), and Greenbaum (1988). Group interviews were conducted around a table in a larger room, with refreshments available. Participants in the group interview process were informed that although there were certain areas of particular interest and thus

certain questions that would be asked, they were encouraged to pursue other relevant topics concerning their beliefs, to speak to each other as well as the interviewer, and to question each other and the group as a whole. Group interviews allowed subjects to interact, challenge, and elicit important ideas and information from each other that may not have been a part of the interviewer's original agenda. These areas were often subsequently included in individual interviews to obtain more in-depth answers. A group process was encouraged, rather than an individual one in which each subject answered in turn a specific question posed by the interviewer. This was explicitly done in order to realize the hypothesized benefits of the group process, namely, to elicit a greater amount of topic areas. After the first two group interviews, the interviewer kept track of the speaker by writing a coded number (e.g. f1 for female one) each time a new speaker began to talk. Originally, this was done because the transcriber had had difficulty differentiating speakers. The effect of this was that subjects began to interact with each other more and looked less often to the interviewer for guidance or questions.

Groups consisted of 3-6 subjects, with a mean of 4 subjects. Three groups contained both males and females, while two groups were composed solely of females. Given the very limited number of groups run, and the lack of concrete information on the amount or type of input per subject, no definitive conclusions may be drawn about the variables and effects of group composition, but it appeared that size, gender composition and homogeneity of beliefs all had some effect on the data elicited. From the interviewer's and

transcribers' logs, and the data generated from the interviews, it seems that when a male was present in the group, he tended to dominate the discussion. Female subjects seemed more willing to express themselves when the group composition was all female. Subjects participating in smaller groups tended to give more depth in their answers while larger groups produced more irrelevant material while touching on a broader range of relevant topics. When groups are used in conjunction with individual interviews, larger groups may be more useful to elicit new material and attempt to ensure that all relevant areas are explored in the data collection process. Homogeneity of the groups, in terms of religious and spiritual beliefs, also appeared to influence subjects' participation. Subjects in more homogeneous groups seemed to be more open, and willing to expose more of their feelings and doubts. In addition, group process seemed most interactive when group members agreed. However, groups where subjects were not in agreement often elicited useful information through the questions and answers between disagreeing subjects.

Interviewing logs were kept by the interviewer and the transcribers, recording impressions of individuals, group processes and dynamics, behavioral observations of the subjects, and general thoughts and insights sparked by each interview. Questions for future interviews were also recorded in these logs. Transcribers were encouraged to reflect on the approach of the interviewer in order to detect any systematic bias in question content or presentation. This information was then used in conducting future interviews.

Follow-up interviews were conducted to help evaluate the validity of the proposed theory, as subject evaluation has been shown to be helpful for controlling experimenter bias when evaluating data (Griggs, 1987). Validity is supported if subjects examine the theory and can find a structure that reflects their personal beliefs and their understanding of beliefs in general. Subjects who chose to be contacted for the feedback aspect of the study were called by one of the research assistants approximately three to five months after their initial interviews. One follow-up group with two previously interviewed subjects was conducted. This session was conducted in a manner similar to the group interviews described above, but without refreshments. The group consisting of research assistants and the primary research advisor was also conducted in this manner. Subjects were presented with an outline of the content and function domains that had been derived from the original data (see Appendix E). Subjects were asked to reflect upon the validity of the domains, whether there were any other areas that should be included and whether they could see their beliefs reflected in the structure presented. The outline was then reviewed, with the interviewer providing explanatory remarks and examples.

Groups were used for this procedure instead of individual interviews, since the aim was to elicit the most information, as opposed to the most detailed information. The group consisting of research assistants and the primary research advisor was used because these people were familiar with the data from all of the interviews, not just from one particular interview in which they had participated. It had been hoped that a larger number of the initial

subjects would be involved in the follow-up discussions. However, the primary determinant of how many groups to run had been pre-established as whether the data elicited in the follow-up interviews indicated major omissions or questionable inclusions. Such errors were not found in the follow-up discussions conducted. Thus, no attempt was made to further encourage previous subjects to return.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Data Analysis

The data analysis began during data collection through the process of keeping the experimental logs. Trends that began to emerge were noted here, and possible content and function domains suggested by the data were hypothesized. Questions for later interviews directly reflected these hypothesized domains. Thus, the process of data analysis began during data collection and shaped the nature of subsequent data collection. This process is, of course, inherent in qualitative or flexible methodology.

Each interview was transcribed by one of three undergraduate research assistants. This transcript was then checked against the recording of the interview by a different assistant. These assistants received three credits for nine hours of work per week for two semesters. Final transcriptions were checked by the experimenter through random spot checks in order to assure accurate recording of the data. Spot checks consisted of checking two to three sections of approximately five minutes each per side of tape against the transcriptions (a total of four to six checks per interview). Approximately nine of the transcripts were checked. These transcripts were chosen at random, the only requisite being that all transcribers were checked at least twice. This ensured that both individual and group interviews were spot-checked, as one transcriber had been responsible for transcribing all of the group

interviews. Spot checks revealed no significant errors in transcription.

Formal analysis of the transcripts began after all thirteen individual and group interviews had been transcribed. The first stage of the formal data analysis consisted of constructing general questions reflecting possible content and function domains to use in coding the data. This was done by skimming the transcripts for general content and function domains emerging from the content of the interviews. All transcripts were used for this process, since it was possible for a particular content or function domain to be reflected in only one interview, due to chance factors or the systematic effects from factors such as cultural biases and religious affiliation or background. Because the aim of this study was to build a descriptive theory of content and function that was not constrained by culture or specific religious affiliation or background, it was hoped that no domain would be found in only one interview as this could indicate that the domain was idiosyncratic to the culture or specific religious affiliation of that subject. It was indeed the case that no domain was found in only one interview; every content or function domain presented in the results was present in at least two interviews.

Initially, this first stage of the formal data analysis consisted of examining the transcripts word for word. However, it was soon obvious that this detailed examination was eliciting questions addressing the specific answers in the individual interviews, as opposed to questions that could be used to code these answers into a structure of content and function domains addressing religious

beliefs in general. Thus, skimming the data to generate questions reflecting general content and function domains covered in the interviews became the process used for this initial stage of the formal data analysis.

The general questions suggested by the first stage of formal data analysis were then sorted into content and function domains. This sorting was done on the basis of content of the question, and similar words or concepts used. For example, questions such as what is the nature of God, or a higher power? what are the limits of God? is God separate from you and/or everything else? and are there sub-powers, like angels, that act or interact for God? were sorted into the domain General Information on a Higher Power. The initial attempt to code the data reflecting function was aimed at creating domains reflecting the function of religious beliefs in general. However, the initial questions generated suggested that specific content domains could serve specific or different functions (e.g. one function of believing in a higher power may be to combat the feeling of isolation, whereas one function of believing in life after death could be to ensure life continuing). Thus, the questions were sorted into content domains, function of specific content domains and function of belief systems. The initial questions also suggested that some of the data reflected influences on beliefs, as opposed to content or function of beliefs (e.g. family cohesion, see results below). Some interview content was therefore sorted into influence domains.

In order to protect against bias, the three research assistants were also asked to sort the initial questions into content and function domains. Research assistant one developed content domains parallel

to the primary researcher's with the exception of omitting a content domain on fate. Research assistant two developed content domains parallel to the primary researcher's with the exception of omitting a content domain on supernatural occurrences, coding these questions under the function domain of explaining the unexplainable. Research assistant three developed content domains parallel to the primary researcher's with the exception of omitting a domain on supernatural occurrences; he did not code these questions. The research assistants attempted to code function questions in a general way, developing domains of function of beliefs in general. Their codings noted specific content domains under specific function areas (e.g. under the function domain explanation: explain dreams, explain creation), supporting the division of functions to address particular content domains. However, because their initial coding did not explicitly divide functions to reflect different content domains, the function domains developed by these research assistants are more difficult to compare with the primary researcher's than were the content domains. It appears that the research assistants developed function areas roughly parallel to the primary researcher's with no obvious omissions or additions.

The second stage of the formal data analysis consisted of re-analyzing the data, looking at every answer and question in every interview. This detailed analysis insured that no content or function domain would be overlooked by the strategy of skimming the data to generate initial domains. Interview content that did not fit into one of the existing content, function or influence domains was examined for relevance. Relevant data formed new content, function or

influence domains. These domains became a part of future analysis. All information in the transcripts was coded into a content, function, or influence domain, or else marked as irrelevant (e.g. discussions of undergraduate classes or sports) and disregarded. Relevant information was coded on the basis of content, the question being addressed, and similar words and concepts used. Data were examined to determine whether subjects seemed to differentiate between different domains themselves, or whether the divisions were primarily determined by the experimenter. In general, subjects seemed to differentiate between different domains; data relevant to a particular domain tended to be discussed at the same time during the interview, as opposed to domains being intermingled.

The interview logs were also analyzed and coded for content and function, differentiating information from these logs and information from the transcripts. These logs were also used to provide the information about interviewing dynamics, differences between individual and group interviews and the hypothesized effects of gender, size and homogeneity of groups on group process and content. Discrepancies between coded transcript data and information from the logs were sought through examining comments from the logs to see whether the hypotheses generated at that time about the content or domains in the interview were consistent with the coding of the data and the domains generated from the data analysis. No discrepancies were found; all hypotheses regarding possible function and content domains in the logs were reflected in the data analysis. However, it should be recognized that the domains

hypothesized in the logs were used to generate subsequent interview questions. Thus, the inclusion of these hypothesized domains in the results reflects, in part, an unavoidable association due to the methodology. It has been shown that interviewing logs can provide important information about group pressures and the effect of the interviewing process (Schnur, 1990). The logs were thus examined for emotional impressions and evaluation bearing on the data collected.

The coded data were then reviewed. Domains that reflected comparable ideas were identified through examining and comparing the supporting data for different domains in terms of similar content and key words and themes; comparable domains were collapsed under one heading. Domains that were subdomains of other ideas were reorganized to reflect that fact.

The coded data were then outlined, using the titles of content, function and influence domains with selected examples and descriptions to illustrate each of them. This outline was presented to the follow-up groups. The follow-up interviews were also transcribed and checked. These transcriptions were then analyzed for discrepancies with the original formulation. No new content or function domains were indicated, and none of the existing ones were found to be objectionable. The primary outcome of the follow-up interviews was an examination of the language used to describe the content and function domains. In some cases, the titles of the domains were modified to more accurately reflect their intended meaning. In addition, follow-up data indicated that some functions were better associated with content domains other than the ones

they were originally connected to in the outline, and some subdomains were more related to different parent domains than those presented in the outline. The initial data was revisited in order to see if these data were reflected there. Some function domains were moved to serve different content domains (e.g. the function domain of fate and determinism was moved from a function of higher power to a function of fate). Some subdomains were moved to reflect a connection with a different parent domain (e.g. the function subdomain of why good things happen to bad people was moved from being a function subdomain of higher power to being a function subdomain of creation and the continued investment of a higher power in its creation).

Results

Content Domains

Seven major content domains were derived: (a) Higher Power, (b) Creation, (c) the Soul, (d) Life after Death, (e) Connection with Others, (f) Fate, and (g) Supernatural Occurrences. Many of these domains were divided further into subdomains.

Higher Power Beliefs. Content beliefs about a higher power were concerned primarily with the nature of that higher power and the connection between the higher power and oneself. This domain encompassed five general questions: (a) what is the general character or definition of the higher power?, (b) is the higher power a separate entity with an existence independent of oneself, other people, or the universe in general?, (c) are there sub-powers who act or interact on behalf of the higher power?, (d) is there an opposite higher power

(e.g. a Devil), and what is the nature of that if there is?, and (e) what is the nature and extent of an individual's connection with the higher power?

The nature of the higher power was implied in descriptions of a higher power, such as a tripartite God, a force or energy, or a ball of light:

> I think there's some sort of higher force, I don't know if I would necessarily call it God, that motivates things to happen or causes things to happen. (4f2)[3]

> I believe in a God which we cannot see but we have faith that He's there....Jesus was the son of God....God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. (9f)

> One ball of light...call it God. (5m1)

> I believe in some kind of force or energy...it could be some kind of higher power within you, or like, anyone, which could be considered God. I mean I don't believe in a God, but I believe in some kind of higher, like a force or something. (1f1)

> I don't think it [God] thinks in the same way that we do, it plans out its day, goes through it, but I think that maybe on another level it is intelligent and I'm not saying that it's good or bad but it does have some sense of knowledge. (4f2)

The matter of the distinctiveness and independence of the higher power was implied in statements that defined God as

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[3]This number represents the interview number and the sex of the speaker. The first number represents the interview number, the letter represents the gender of the speaker. For group interviews, a third number is added (as in this case); this represents the number of the speaker in the group. Thus 4f2 indicates interview four, female two.

separate, exerting His will, or the energy that is the higher power being a part of everything and everybody that exists:

> I feel that God is a part of everything I see. (3m)
>
> That ball of light gives away a part of itself and that is you, all of you. (5m1)
>
> He's [God] in everyone. (8f4)
>
> God is love but He also punishes those who disobey....I can speak to God and I know that someday He can speak to me. (9f)

Some subjects referred to this higher power as a personal ideal to strive towards; this idea suggests that the higher power is something to emulate, or perhaps a potential within oneself that can be actualized:

> God is the person you should be if you were a really good person, and the person you should strive to be. (7f)

Several subjects also introduced the idea of angels or prophets (such as Moses or Buddha) carrying the word of the higher power, or interceding with humanity on behalf of the higher power:

> All the stuff on earth is taken up by guardian angels and they are all the ones who do all the running around and checking up on people....[a guardian angel is] someone who keeps you out of trouble. (10m1)

A further subdomain related to the higher power is the idea of an opposite higher power, e.g. Satan as opposed to God. Although most subjects who mentioned Satan specifically stated that they did

not believe in Him, the repeated mention of the topic warrants a content subdomain:

> There isn't going to be a Satan [for evil people after death]. (5f2)

> The Devil is angry and He wants to destroy me as well as many other people that have God....when Satan first came down to earth, you know that in Heaven He wanted to take control, to take dominion and He was thrown out and God cursed Him...in that He was going to live in Hell for eternal life. (9f)

The connection between the individual and the higher power was addressed at several levels. Subjects would often explore the nature and extent of their connection with the higher power. This exploration included whether the higher power was a separate entity (see above). Further subdomains were the higher power's control over one's actions. and the interaction of this control with free will:

> I believe that God has created people, created all aspects of earth in such a way where there is this chance to exist together....but I believe that you have the ultimate choice of deciding what you would like to do on this earth, whether of God, or bad things maybe not of God. So the free will would come into play where you can do ultimately what you want, like you're not controlled by God. (3m)

> He [God] doesn't dictate what you do, He gives you the choice to choose between what you do is good or bad. (8f4)

> I think He or She can actually make something happen....I think God is just guiding, you know? Kind of like guiding our soul for us to make a decision. (8f2)

Subject: When God made us at first, He gave us free liberty, but in that sense when Adam and Eve were created, God did not make them like robots; He didn't want them to be slaves. He wanted them to serve Him from their own free will. There's only two ways out of here, either you go to Heaven or you go to Hell, so if I sort of decide to go to Heaven, then I follow God...Let's say if I decided to go to a faraway land and that was not God's plan for me. He will either tell me by some person or tell me in my dream or make something drastic happen so I won't go. That's the way He sort of tells me that's not My plan, but then again, for Him to talk to us and for us to listen we'd have to be in that close communication with Him.

Interviewer: So He could tell you and you could not listen?

Subject: Yes, like He might tell me but I can disobey and sometimes if I go to that far away place and its not my time to go, there might [be] something [that] happens to me. I might be killed. That means it wasn't my time, maybe it was in the future time, not in my time. (9f)

One aspect of this connection subdomain was whether an individual has some influence on the connection with the higher power. Some individuals felt that one could willfully communicate with God, e.g. through prayer: "I still pray and sometimes my prayers have been answered" (8f2). Other subjects believed that the connection with a higher power was internal, and could be maximized through self-exploration and meditation:

> We had to do a meditation, we had to go and concentrate on parts of our body.. I think you have to concentrate on the energy that's within you and then that somehow changes your state of mind. (1f2)

Whether the higher power prescribes certain correct ways to maintain a positive connection was also investigated. This latter idea

involved the concepts of sin and worship. One subject described how the connection with God can only be maintained through following the Bible on a literal level:

> The person [who] does not have God in themselves, have accepted the lord as his Savior, will not have any access to Heaven....There are many things we should follow but we don't because there are many things in this Book [the Bible] that says, that we shouldn't do, like especially women, especially that we can't do....In the Bible it also tells me how to live my life according to God's will. It tells me when to read the Bible--morning, noon and night. It tells me what to do in times of need. (9f)

This woman also described rules such as not wearing pants or jewelry if one is a woman and not engaging in sexual intercourse except as a means to procreate. To refuse to follow these rules indicates a turning away from God.

A further subdomain indicated in the data concerning connection with a higher power was the personal or universal nature of the higher power. Some subjects indicated that there was one higher power that was called by different names and worshipped in different ways depending on culture:

> I don't believe that there is only one true God, that Buddha and Christ are any different in any real way. I think there is one universal God and everybody has the right to believe and worship Him in any way they want because they're all worshipping the same thing in the end. (10m)

Other subjects believed that there was only one true God:

> Subject: I believe in a God, not Buddha or any of those....

Interviewer: So you think that people who worship something other than God by that label really are worshipping something different that's not God?

Subject: They are worshipping a statue which is first of all against God and second of all they are asking prayers [to] something, like I said, [that] does not hear, does not talk or speak or listen. (9f)

Still others felt that the higher power was a personal idea, different for all individuals:

> Maybe there's sort of a personal God for everyone ....everyone has their own higher good being. (6f)

Creation Beliefs. Most beliefs about creation addressed the nature of creation and the involvement of a higher power in this creation. These beliefs involved the extent of the higher power's initial and continued involvement; there appeared to be a continuum from believing that a higher power had nothing to do with the creation of the universe (e.g. not believing in a higher power at all would imply this) through believing that the higher power just began creation or influenced the beginning and then disengaged, to believing that the higher power created the world and continued to control or influence happenings in the world:

> I think that God is just the guy who said, okay, let's have the big bang and He set into motion all the necessary forces to bring it about. I mean He lives forever, He doesn't have to worry about having it happen in seven days, He's got millennium....I think nothingness is very boring and [God] probably wanted something to do....I think we are removed from Him [God]...If we blow up the world He'll know and maybe He'll experience a minute amount of sadness, but it's so small compared to the rest of the scheme of things is that He wouldn't notice for

long. So it's not like, we're not injuring anything personal to Him. (10m)

My belief is that there's a higher force out there that influences things to happen, influences evolution, influences the path the human race takes. (4f3)

At first when God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, all three of them, created the world. There was no explanation of how They created heaven and stuff like that but He did create the stars, the sun and all of that. And the way He created man was [from] dust, and He gave life to that form by blowing into him.(9f)

Thus, the higher power was not always seen as creating everything.

Some subjects also stated the belief that we are just one of the creations of the higher power as opposed to this world's being the only world with life and connection to the higher power:

I'm pretty sure we are not the only civilized life form in the universe. There is probably several billion others. Why would He [God] pay attention to this as opposed to someplace else? (10m).

When you look at the universe, you're going like, this is one planet out of like how many that have life on it? (4f3)

A further subdomain under the heading of creation was the possibility that man created God, as opposed to God's creating man:

Maybe there is just this one big void and once you're gone, you're gone, that's it, and that's why we created God. (4f2)

One subject (12f) stated on her way out that she believed that Western people needed to create a God because they had to create

and shape the land, whereas in Japan, where she was brought up, the land was naturally good so they did not have to create a God. Thus, the Japanese believe in existence but the Westerners believe in creation (experimental log, interview 12).[4]

Soul Beliefs. Content beliefs about the soul were concerned primarily with the nature of the soul, the relationship of the soul to the afterlife and the body, and the origin of the soul. The nature of the soul was described in several ways:

> Well, I don't really call it a soul, I would rather say energy. Everything has energy, everything that lives has energy. (1f1)

> A soul is what connects us with God and a spirit is what helps us here around earth and helps us choose. (9f)

> I think my soul is my thoughts and innermost feelings. I think the soul is what drives someone to do what they do....The soul brings the most basic level of principles. (10m)

> I think a person's soul is kind of like their personality and what they've done with their life and how it affected other people. (2f)

The interaction between one's soul and one's individuality or personality was mentioned by those who did not equate the two as well:

> Subject 4f1: People say oh, well, your soul goes and your individuality, your personality stays with the soul

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[4]The subject stated this after the tape had been turned off, on her way out. The content was recorded immediately after she left in the experimental log for that interview. Data coming from the experimenter's log will be noted as such and connected with the particular interview the log pertained to.

but I don't believe that. I think there's maybe an energy force.

Subject 4f4: Your personality doesn't go with the soul?

Subject 4f1: Yeah, you know, its almost like an energy, like nothing substantial. You don't have a good sense of humor, you don't have a bad sense of humor. You're not an evil, you know, your soul is not evil or bad but it's what makes you alive....I don't think that the soul has a personality in that its good or bad.

The person is the choices you make and if you are put in a situation where you can hurt someone or not not hurt someone the person chooses which way to go. The life force doesn't really. It may influence you in a general sense but I don't think it makes specific choices. (4f?)[5]

The relationship of the soul to the afterlife and the body was a further subdomain inferred from the data. Those who believed in the soul saw it as the part of oneself that continues after the death of the body, and thus viewed the body and the soul as separate:

I think there's definitely some kind of soul in people. I think its impossible to think that when people die, they're dead. Like I said before, they're dead in a physical sense but I think there's something there that goes into another body....I think that there's a soul and there's a body and when the body dies the soul goes on into another body. (1m1)

I don't think anything maintains its shape when it goes to Heaven. It becomes liquid, like, balls of light, I suppose. There is no physical form. You become your own thoughts, your soul which has no form. (10m)

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[5]This group interview had four female subjects who sounded very much alike. This was before the interviewer began to keep track of the speakers. The transcriber had difficulty distinguishing which speaker was which, and thus the ? as the third character in the citation. Previous citations from this interview were partially determined from consistency between the content of the quote and content which had been clearly identified as coming from a specific speaker.

Even subjects who defined the soul as one's personality viewed it as continuing after the death of the body in the memories others had:

> My soul is who I am right now and what I've done and what I believe or think I believe. When I die those who knew me, they keep my soul alive because they remember who I am and what I did and believed, or what I was in past time....so my soul still exists because I'm remembered but I'm not physically here. (2f)

> Your soul, the way it lives on is if you were a really good person then after you die people want to be like you. So they take the good parts of you and that's your good soul and they try to emulate that or transcribe it into themselves. (7f)

The memory of the soul after death was also explored: whether the soul remembers the life in the body after death or whether the memory, the body and the personality are all discarded after death. This subdomain relates the subdomains of the soul's relation to the afterlife, and the soul's relation to the personality.

> I think you remain unique....I think you take your memories and your personality, your likes and your dislikes. Of course your likes and your dislikes are constantly metamorphosizing as you go so they'll probably change in Heaven. (10m)

> Subject 4f1: I still haven't made up my mind about reincarnation but I don't think that we carry the memories. Like you (4f2) said, we might have a sense of what's good or bad or something like that, deja-vu or something. Maybe that's a sense of something that happened before, but I don't think we carry explicit memories.

Subject 4f2: I don't think we could, otherwise we'd all be saying, you know, otherwise we'd walk over to our parents' tombstones and say oh, well, [and] tell your children... this is what I was.

I think you have everything and anything that you've experienced before. Your previous life is clear but it's in the back of your mind where I guess it can leak sometimes. Like in your dream state I believe that you're kind of in your own private universe and you're floating through that part and all the lives that you've experienced, they kind of float around. (5m1)

The nature of the soul in terms of whether human beings are the only creatures to possess a soul was a further subdomain:

Subject 1f2: What happens after dogs die or other animals?

Subject 1m1: Probably the same thing.

Subject 1f2: They are born again.

Subject 1m1: Probably...

Interviewer: Does that mean, you could have been a dog, is the thought.

Subject 1m1: No, I'm thinking dogs are dogs, cats are cats, people are people.

Subject 1f2: They have their separate world so they wait on separate lines.

Subject 1m1: Yes, exactly.

There's just something within you that's not tangible. Whether a tree has a soul, or a dog has a soul...In a funny way, I want to say yes, only because I don't know, if its created by God, it, perhaps you could view it like that...Who's to say because I'm more intellectual than a dog I would have a soul and he wouldn't, type of thing...Perhaps everything has a soul, or a type of soul, meaning its existence. But because of differences, what seems to be purposes within this world, it's horrible to take an axe to a person but not to a tree, because maybe that's its purpose. (3m)

Subject: Everything has a soul.

Interviewer: Everything? Like, a rock has a soul?
Subject: No, okay. Anything that is living, so plants I would give a soul...I could have been a tree. If I was a tree, I probably wouldn't know the difference. If I was a tree I'd probably be happy to be a tree because being a tree is what I would be. (10m)

The origin of the soul was the final content subdomain under this heading. Some subjects saw the soul existing and waiting to be embodied, while by implication those who believed the soul to be the personality did not feel that the soul existed prior to one's birth and development:

Interviewer: Where did your soul come from?
Subject: A great, like, big pool of souls and like I was conceived and someone said "need a soul for that one" and picked me out and there it was. (10m)

Perhaps there is a well of souls in which souls exist always. (3m)

Life After Death Beliefs. Content beliefs about the afterlife were divided into those concerned with the nature of the afterlife and those addressing the effect of present beliefs and actions on the afterlife. Beliefs about the nature of the afterlife included reincarnation, returning to the force that is the higher power, and descriptions of Heaven and Hell:

I had another out of body experience. It's like I kept lifting and lifting and I had this hand reaching for me and I reached for it and it pulled me out and I saw the earth and I looked beside me and I saw this figure and it was tiny. It was all light, about the size of me and inside I could see a silhouette and then I wasn't scared. I just felt very peaceful and I looked down at the world and I saw all these balls of light shooting off. And they were going

by me and then I looked and I saw this black tunnel. And I couldn't see at first because it was black but then they lit up the sky. It's like I could see the tunnel where they were going and then I saw this other ball of light coming towards me and then it hit me. And I looked at myself and I wasn't human, I guess. And I knew what was up there but I couldn't go; it wasn't time for me to go and but just kind of like everything fell into place. And I guess I just pictured in my head, just the ball, almost like the sun. And what was happening on earth is that people were dying and their spirits were going by me and going to that ball of light. And then, I believe that when we die, you know, our physical body stays here and then our astral body or soul leaves and it goes to this ball of light and regenerates. (5m1)

When a person dies, if they are righteous with God, they are serving God and they have God in their hearts, they will, their souls will go up to Heaven, not where God is, but in a waiting place. And as soon as God comes, as soon as Jesus comes, He will raise the dead--first those who are in that waiting place, to go up to Heaven, and then those people who are here on earth ready for Him will go up with Him...In the Bible it says that Heaven is beautiful rocks, not rocks as in pebbles, like little precious rocks. There's like a lake of glass...When we get to Heaven our names will be changed, my name will no longer be and therefore all we're going to do is praise God. (9f)

Subject: I think you can't hide your thoughts in Heaven, or whatever thoughts you might have. So therefore, everyone knows what you are thinking and it's a lot more honest, which means the people you tend to stay around with, the people you would call friends up there, you would have an honest opinion from them of your weaknesses, your strengths and whether they actually love you...Hell is just, Hell is real broad. Hell is bad... Hell is probably what you dread the most and that's it, there's where you spend the rest of eternity with the thing you dread the most....

Interviewer: If you take what has been to you on this earth with you, then is your soul going to be really different in Heaven than the soul of, like, a tree?

Subject: The tree will take its experiences too and will be able to convey them to you. So you'll be able to tell him about playing chess or something and it can tell you about having a bird nest in his left branch or something like that. Maybe your best friend in Heaven will be a tree. (10m)

My beliefs are more that the afterlife, as far as I think, we're on this earth as a learning period and, let's put it this way, if I died tomorrow, I don't think that I'd lived enough to have eternal peace. So I believe that there is, like, life on other planets and our souls kind of get dispersed to other places and that if we didn't achieve something in this life, something you could not work through....you come back and you work on the problems that you did not achieve in that life. (11m2)

The effect of one's present life and beliefs on the afterlife was the second content subdomain under this heading. The difference between a good person's life after death and a bad person's life after death was repeatedly raised:

Subject: I don't think He [God] interferes a lot when we're alive, with earth, but I think that what happens if you die, and if you're like a Hitler, I think the light doesn't offer what you want, so you won't go to it because it offers goodness, not the power that somebody like Hitler might want to crave And so not going into the light would be a sort of Hell, but the light doesn't offer a soul that's like, Hitler would want and if somebody wanted to go into the light it would mean that it offered to them what they wanted, if they want to be a part of the light or going to Heaven.

Interviewer: So what would happen to somebody like Hitler?

Subject: I don't know. I just don't think that he or anyone like that would want to go into the light if he were truly evil--right?--and just wanted power. They would go searching for power, maybe as a ghost. (4f?)

In addition, the role of a higher power in judging one's actions and beliefs during the present life in order to determine the nature of one's afterlife was a part of this subdomain:

> If that person never knows about God but lives a horrible life, or something I would consider horrible, but never knows the difference, I think that God will still accept that person as being good. (3m)

> Subject: Sometimes we tend to do things that we shouldn't. But even though that's one out for us, for me for example, if I do something wrong, God will mark it down and then I can repent from it and God will forgive. He'll forgive and forget and when the day of Judgment comes, He will show me: so this is what you did and this, this, this and then He'll tell me how I accepted God as a Savior and this is what you did.
> Interviewer: Then He'll balance and judge you?
> Subject: Yes. (9f)

> Subject: Every day, whatever we do, every task we do is a test. You might not think so, it's a test. He's testing us.
> Interviewer: Who's testing us?
> Subject: God. Well, I mean we're allowed to make mistakes and all that and actually we don't even know if we're doing the right thing, but I believe that every, like the decisions we make, certain tasks that we do, things that we choose to take part in, all that is a test of who we are and what we choose to believe in. (11f1)

Some subjects believed that it was not a higher power that determined the nature of the after life, but rather one's own beliefs about what that afterlife would be like:

> I don't believe that there's Heaven and Hell. If you're bad you don't go to Hell and be punished. I think they'll [evil people] actually like it. I don't see them not liking it. I think you really invent your own type of Heaven. (5f2)

> If you believe in a Hell, maybe your life will be Hell, maybe there'll be a Hell in your afterlife will be Hell too. But if you believe in Heaven, then your life and your afterlife is what you make it to be. (11f1)

Connection with Others Beliefs. Beliefs about a connection between individuals were divided into three subdomains: (a) feeling connected with individuals, (b) feeling connected with a group, and (c) prescribed behavior for the way in which to interact with others.

Feeling connected with other individuals seemed to be an important part of many people's religious beliefs. Thus, many subjects described understanding and loving others as a part of their beliefs:

> I do believe there's a force that keeps us together.... something that keeps us able to communicate with each other. Something obviously draws us together, in love and friendship...a sense of community, whether that's just being human and tied to each other. (6f)

> Interviewer: Are there other areas that you would put under religious beliefs or spiritual beliefs that we haven't touched on?
>
> Subject: This is kind of weird: friendship, also the nature of it, some kind of extent, friendship. In my book friendship is very important because there's a lot of times when I don't think I can really exist without my friends....
>
> Interviewer: And how do you relate that to religion or spirituality?
>
> Subject: Well, it's something that's a common occurrence. It takes place every day. It's something that you think about. You think about your friends that are 3000 miles away or friends that live elsewhere that you cannot talk to and you can't see but you wonder about things....they're kind of with you when you're not. That's kind of spiritual, it's kind of like a thing in your soul.

> Your soul is here with you. Like I have my friend's souls even though my friends are like in [name of town]. I mean, I still think about them and they share with me....I think about somebody I care about every single day, more than I think about God. I don't think about God every day. (2f)

> I was asked for my beliefs again. This is not common in experiments. Is it primarily the subject matter? The communal nature of the subject--a desire to connect with people, or with God that makes people want to know what I believe? (experimental log, interview 2)

One type of this connection concerns a connection between souls, for example as one gets closer to another, their souls communicate more easily, or feeling that there is a soulmate that is intended for one in this life:

> I think some people are, I don't know if it's meant to be together or just hit it off real well. There's something about them that's compatible whereas some people are just totally different from one another. (5f2)

> You know, when you're on the same wavelength with someone you can kind of tell what they're thinking. Like when you know someone really well, or you just meet someone and kind of get along, you're kind of in synch with them. Somehow I think that has a lot to do with, not really a soul, anything religious, but some kind of higher awareness. (1f1)

Feeling connected with a group through one's beliefs was a further subdomain under this heading. Many people felt that their beliefs connected them with a cultural identity or a spiritual ingroup, or that their beliefs created an ideal of overall unity between the peoples of the world:

Subject: I spent six weeks in Israel; it was really a profound experience. I went to the wailing wall, where, it's the site of the destruction of the second holy temple. And I went up to it; it was the most amazing experience....I touched it. I was like, crying, because it was such an incredible experience because there were so many people crying and praying. And it was such a sense of belonging....it was such a symbol and I was touching something 2000 years old that people I'm a descendent of also touched....It was just like a connection, and I mean also a religious structure, but it was such a sense of belonging, such an intense thing because people were there crying and praying and there was old people and young people, people holding babies and it was just very intense.

Interviewer: So what moved you was?

Subject: The connection to people. (2f)

I think there are certain parts of your religion that make you unified to all people. (7f)

Subject: I go to temple and pray for the Jewish people as a whole.

Interviewer: Do you think that your connection to those people or your feeling a part of something bigger in Judaism is part of being spiritual for you?

Subject: Yes, definitely. (8f6)

The final subdomain under this heading is found in most theologies: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Thus, many subjects described being good to other people or trying to be a good person as a part of their religious beliefs:

I just believe that if you feel good about yourself and if you, if you're a good person, I know that sounds really kind of basic, but if you do what you can for other people. I'm not saying go out and save the world but if you just try to do unto others as you would have them do unto you, or I'm not quite sure how that goes. I really believe

in that. I guess I also think that everybody, deep inside, there's good in everybody. (13f)

Fate Beliefs. Beliefs about fate were concerned with defining fate, usually as an occurrence that was meant to happen:

> Fate means some things were just meant to happen. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen. (4f?)

Subjects often spoke of predetermined occurrences, and explored the distinction between fate and a higher power:

> Interviewer: Do you think there's a relationship between fate and God.
>
> Subject: Yes. I think so. I think there's something. I think its all related in some way or another and I think that everything happens and there's a reason for it. (4f?)

> I think fate is my term for God, but there's more that people claim to know about God. I don't really know too much about it. (6f)

Supernatural Occurrences Beliefs. Many subjects connected dreams, extra-sensory perception, prophecy, or visions with their religious beliefs. These were experiences that were described as related to their spirituality but not necessarily connected to a higher power:

> I used to be very superstitious, I used to believe in ESP and reincarnation and a whole bunch of stuff but I've gotten very skeptical. But I'm hesitant to say there's no such thing as ghosts because sometime I'll be alone in my house, something's going to do it just to scare me, just to prove they do exist. (5f3)

> Subject: We lived in apartment 13 when I was small and my sister was only two and she always claimed

that someone was coming out of our closet to take her. And she was only two and she couldn't really talk yet but she'd wake up and go, "Mommy, the man with the black hat came to get me last night." ....I'd sleep through this whole thing. My sister would be up, like halfway in the closet going "I don't wanna go. I don't wanna go." And she'd be hanging onto her teddy in the bed and my parents couldn't get in the room to save their life and the door was always open. The door was never shut, but they could never get in the room. Something wasn't letting them into the room. It would get to the point where they couldn't breathe if they'd go any closer. So they used to sleep in our room and try to catch the guy that was doing it....And once my mom saw the man and he put his hand over her face and that was the only thing she remembered 'til the next morning....

Interviewer: Do you relate this at all to God or to Satan or anything?

Subject: No, I believe that there are spirits that are just kind of wandering around aimlessly. (5f2)

Function Domains

Function domains were defined for each of the content domains and for belief systems as a whole. In general, the data indicated that the function of a content domain reflected the general content domain, not the subdomains; subjects discussed the functions of the belief domain as a whole, without seeming to differentiate between content subdomains. While many of these functions were directly expressed by the subjects, others were implied in the content data, such as certain beliefs serving to explain the unexplainable.

Functions of Higher Power Beliefs. Belief in the existence of a higher power served several functions for the subjects interviewed. Subjects reflected that belief in a higher power guides people into

good action, providing an ideal to strive towards and creating rules and morality:

> It [my belief in God] sets a standard that I can strive towards if that is my choice, and I [do] choose to. (3m)

> Maybe something higher that can help me through this, or someone to strive to be. That's something like your always striving to be a little bit better....and its something that maybe I can reach for. (7f)

The belief that a higher power guides people into good action was connected to the idea that a higher power will judge one, and thus one should attempt to do what is right in order to ensure approval:

> If you didn't believe in God then everyone would just do whatever the hell they wanted because no one is watching over and no one is, like, if you have no reason to be good then why bother? (7f)

Belief in a higher power served to ensure a just world in an interaction with beliefs about the afterlife; individuals believed that the higher power would ensure that bad people are punished while good people are rewarded (see also below, Function of Life after Death Beliefs):

> I'm not going to go out and murder somebody because I think that I don't want to go to jail, but number two, I think it would have an adverse effect on what my Heaven would be because I killed somebody. (5f2)

The belief in a higher power also provided a way to combat the isolation of being an individual human being. This isolation appears

to be addressed through the belief that there is a constant connection with someone or something that will accept or care for one:

> Like we were all talking about, in times of troubles or in times when things go wrong, there's a comfort in believing that someone is out there, is gonna watch over you and help you. (8f3)

> Its the feeling that there's always going to be someone with them, so that if something ever goes wrong, still all hope is not lost and that there is something there. And its really important to feel like they're not totally alone. (5f1)

> There's always someone who will care for you, because that's the other part of being a guardian angel, they have to accept you unconditionally. (10m)

The belief in a higher power could function as an escape or a way to avoid responsibility for one's actions or inaction, or for negative consequences:

> When something bad happens, I blame God, but when something great happens, I blame myself....I think when something awful happens I want to blame something. I don't know if that's because I don't want to feel responsible or just because it helps. (6f)

> Why don't all those men and women [Jews in Israel] who pray and spend their life doing that, why don't they spend their life making Israel better...something that's going to help them now and their people in the future rather than praying to this God, this thing that they can't prove? (1m1)

Belief in a higher power also served control needs in a variety of different ways. The belief that things are not random, but that there is a plan known and guided by a higher power enabled people

to feel that there was some meaning to life's occurrences, or to comfort people:

> When you're living in a world where everything is so uncontrollable you want to believe that something is controlling it....I think God came into effect because it would be comforting to think that there is some reason that all of this is happening. (4f?)

> Subject: You don't know His [God's] mind. He's got a higher mind and it [something you've prayed for] may not be good for you in the long run.
>
> Interviewer: So do you think that helps explain or make bearable bad things that happen?
>
> Subject: Yeah. For me, it makes it more bearable because you know, in the beginning you get so mad and I keep asking why, you know, why'd You do that, because like absolutely nothing good came out of it. Why'd You do that? But then after a while you're just like, whatever Your will be done. (8f4)

Subjects who believed that they could connect with the higher power through prayer felt a greater sense of control, as they indicated that this was a way to have an impact on the outcome of seemingly uncontrollable events:

> My fiancee is going to Saudi Arabia in the next couple of weeks so I'm just praying...I have to rely on something to help me learn to get through it.... It makes me feel better praying that he will come back than if I didn't do anything at all, if I just sat here and said, well, in 360 days he'll come back or he won't come back....maybe if he does come back I'll feel like I had something to do with it because I prayed for him to come back. I think I'd go insane if I had no control over it. (5f2)

Some subjects described a bargaining process with God:

> I'll always say like if You [God] do this or let this happen or keep me safe, then I'll never do that. (8f3)

Subjects also found meaning in the belief in the higher power, not only through the belief that there was a bigger, unknown plan, but also because the connection with the higher power was a way to put oneself in perspective, to know one's place in the scheme of things:

> Like it's [the belief in God] giving you a perspective from which to understand things. (FU1m1)[6]

Functions of Creation Beliefs. The belief in creation by a higher power seemed to serve primarily to explain what is unknown. Some subjects felt more comfortable with leaving the unknown unexplained, while others appeared to feel a need to understand that which is beyond modern-day science. The need for an explanation seemed to be more personally relevant in terms of providing a foundation for understanding one's place in the bigger picture and the force that began the existence that led up to one's own life.

> I believe that something created the earth and everything because there's no other explanation, viable explanation. (2f)

> Everything that has happened on this planet is a billion to one odds. You know, human life is such a random thing, and the fact that there's water on this earth....It just seems like the entire chain of events that led up to where we are now, the odds are so completely against it....it just seems like something had to influence that life but

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[6]The notation FU indicates that the quote came from one of the follow up groups. Group one consisted of the group of research assistants and the research advisor. Group two consisted of previous subjects.

> maybe not directly every day, but at some point, directed life to go this way. Genetics and mutations happened, maybe that mutation was formed by God. (4f3)

> It is like trying also to find, like to identify the roots of, creation is like the beginning, so when we talk about what is creation for us, its like giving, describing the base of what we are. (FU1m2)

The idea that the higher power was no longer invested or controlling its creation served, for some subjects, to explain why bad things happen to good people:

> It [the world] was just kind of set up and its just kind of running like a clock...I believe that its [the higher power] just on its own, like its not affecting us right now because people who are the best people, they can be troubled by things and there's the question why did six million Jews die in the Holocaust and six million other people who were not of the Aryan race....something had to create it all, but maybe it just created it all and didn't account for any good or evil. (2f)

> As far as God being removed, I mean, because, first of all because of the size of the universe and because all the things that happen. I mean, if he was really watching, how could he let people fight over what to call him? I mean, all he'd have to do is throw one thunderbolt down, boom, "I want to be called Bob!" and that would solve it. Everybody would worship Bob. (10m)

Functions of Soul Beliefs. Belief in the soul served four primary functions. This belief gave meaning and purpose to life through the idea that the soul has a goal that it wants to accomplish during this lifetime. This belief also gave meaning and purpose to death, through the idea that one dies when one has achieved the goal of the soul:

I think that when you die on earth, you die for a reason, your time, you know. You have accomplished what this life feels you need to accomplish. (5m1)

People die because they've accomplished what they wanted to, what their soul wanted to accomplish, and decided to accomplish before this next life. Or they got to a point where they couldn't accomplish what they set out to accomplish. I think everybody has some kind of a goal. (1m1)

The belief in the soul also served to explain some of the differences perceived between individuals' morality and personality:

That goes back to the point does God give you your personality....God gives you the tendency to become something. God gives you a basic structure. (5f2)

Subject: I think there are souls with much different, maybe higher or lower thresholds of morals....I think you can always move up, you can always build on the basis of a soul, and thus someone born evil...can be built up to be better or good so that they don't go out and kill people, but somebody with a higher threshold can never be forced to drop below that threshold....

Interviewer: Why do you think that there are some people who are higher and some people who are lower?

Subject: Just because I can't explain why someone goes out and murders people in cold blood, and I can't explain why people, why some people seem to be so much better. (10m)

The major function of the belief in the soul, however, seemed to be to provide something that would live on after the body's death, as is evidenced by the descriptions of life after death requiring a soul.

Functions of Life after Death Beliefs. The most basic function these beliefs served was to ensure the continuation of life:

When you die, you die, it's over. But I have trouble believing that's true. For some reason, I picture a dead body with a mind that's working or something that's thinking stuck in there forever, and can't get out. And that's sort of scary. I'd rather think that somewhere I'm going to go into someone's body. (1m1)

At that point [when you are older] it seems like you want to cling on to something. You want to say there has to be something because I don't want to think you just die and that's it because it seems very cold. (4f?)

Subject 8f2: I can't imagine it just being over.
Subject 8f1: How could it just end? How could it just stop? It just doesn't seem right, so there has to be some kind of purpose.

Belief in the afterlife also functioned as a way to maintain the connection with loved ones who have died, or to imagine a continued connection or reunion with these loved ones after oneself has died:

Someday I'll be reunited with these people [who have died], and then I'll go to Heaven. (8f6)

My grandfather died when I was in the sixth grade and he was the first person I was really close to who died and for his sake I want there to be a Heaven....Maybe when I die I'll see him again, or at least be with him again....I hope that maybe when she [grandmother] dies, that maybe she'll be with him. (13f)

I definitely believe that there's an afterlife. I definitely believe in, like, being reunited with someone who's passed away. I think, well, I was thinking maybe if it was that I really need to believe that because I just can't imagine never seeing some of those people again. (8f1)

Beliefs concerning life after death also contributed to maintaining a just world view, in that the afterlife serves as the ultimate reward or punishment for actions taken in this life time:

> There is great hope in believing that through acting in such a way, in such a positive way, which is something I want to do, that there would be a reward or something good afterwards. (3m)

> I think so many people are unhappy. I see so many people who are....unhappy and I would hate to think that, like I see my grandmother and my aunt after my grandfather died, and I would hate to think...she's going to live the rest of her life as so unhappy and I don't think anybody deserved to be that sad. So I think there's got to be something after death....I want to believe there's something. She deserves to be happy. (13f)

> Subject 8f2: I always think of those people who are like in jail and they murdered somebody or something and then they say that they've found God or something, not that I believe them but....maybe they really did and maybe they have to pay some extra time in purgatory, like, or go to Hell for awhile and then, you know, because they did do something bad....There's a Hell, definitely. There are people that should be there.
>
> Subject 8f1: I would just wonder like, how saintly you have to be to go to Heaven. How bad is bad? And, you know, what makes you end up in Hell or end up in Heaven?
>
> Subject 8f3: I mean nobody's perfect, so I mean there's going to be things you do right, but there are those people, I mean like murderers. I don't believe that they're really good people. I mean, unless, I don't know. I just don't see anybody who murders someone else as a good person.
>
> Interviewer: What about, you had said the guy who murdered (name of student who had been killed last year) was a psychopath and somebody else said that his parents were probably psychopathological....

Subject 8f4: I guess it depends on how they [people who murder] feel about it. Like if they killed someone with no remorse, no matter what their background is, you know, they commit the act and they know its wrong, like just to go out and murder someone, but you don't feel guilty about it. And like, they really feel guilty about it and they really feel like what they did was wrong, and I don't know, I would think those are the people who go to purgatory. But the one's that do it for their own sick pleasure, those are the people who go to Hell.

For those who believed in a judgmental higher power, the belief in a rewarding or punishing afterlife served to further reinforce the need to be moral and good (see function of Higher Power above). The belief in life after death also gave meaning to one's present life, providing purpose or direction to life for some subjects:

I prefer to think that there's not a void out there that one way or another, be it Heaven and Hell, reincarnation or my energy goes to merge with a higher force, I don't think that there is. I would like to believe that there's not just a void, but that this was all worth something somehow, even if I don't remember any of it. (4f2)

I think that this life is being prepared for our next one. Seriously, its like our whole life we're being prepared for something...and I think that the way we are now, the kind of person, is going to do something for when we go to purgatory or Heaven, or whatever. (8f6)

I feel there is a Heaven and a Hell and I'll be reunited and everything, it just makes going into the next day okay. It gives you direction....I need to feel that I'm not just going through life just to die....I think it gives me the hope to go on to something better and every day I hope to better myself. (8f1)

I really hope that there is a Heaven. I'd like to think there is because you go through this whole life, all the, you see so much suffering around and its kind of nice to think, like after you die, there's going to be someplace nice for you so you don't have to worry about anything anymore. It kind of gives you hope to keep on living and not feel like this is a totally useless life. (8f4)

Functions of Connection with Others Beliefs. Including connection with other people as part of religious or spiritual beliefs seemed to serve two primary purposes. The first was that certain relationships were blessed, or more holy:

Subject: There are relationships in which you are closer to some people than others. With a stranger there is less interaction with each other, except for the fact we exist together. So that's a lesser degree than, say, my girlfriend, where we share, we don't just share our physical presence, but we share who I am and who she is....I would say that there is a potential to have a greater intensity, or to different degrees of intensity of being together, of having a relationship between each other....

Interviewer: So the closer you are to somebody the more your souls interact?

Subject: Sure, because you're sharing more things about you, and I would say, in doing so you're interacting in a more intimate situation. (3m)

God is love and if two people love each other and they have God with them, there is nothing in this world, especially if God joined them, there is nothing in this world that can destroy that marriage. (9f)

The other primary function of this belief appeared to be to connect individuals and provide a balance for the subjectiveness and separation that is common in our society:

This subject primarily discussed the lack of explicit religious beliefs in her culture (Japan) as opposed to

beliefs and rituals whose primary purpose seems to be to unite people with each other and the traditions of the past; is it possible that religion acts as a balancing force against individualism, and selfishness, the personal subjective world. There may be less need for this in Japan, as it is such a communal society. (experimental log, interview 12):

Subject: It's a big difference between Japan and the European countries and America. We think unity with different people is very important than individualism....

Interviewer: Do you think that's a good thing?...

Subject: We get united, much closer. (12f)

I think there's only one good part about religion, that's that it brings people together, whether or not they believe in the same things. [It] brings people into groups of friends, people who were brought up the same way and that's really good. It's like a youth group, but it's all through life. (1m1)

The function of connecting individuals can be seen in the content quotes as well (see above). Although some subjects commented on how beliefs can separate people through religious persecution, no subject felt that their personal beliefs created separation. In addition, subjects who felt that separating people was the primary consequence of religious beliefs were those that professed to be atheists or agnostics:

Throughout the history we have witnessed, because of religion people have been persecuted, fought, people everywhere....I'm an atheist, because I've seen what the world has turned into. (1f2)

The fact that subjects who believed that religion separates people rejected religious beliefs lends support for the hypothesis that one of the purposes religious beliefs serve is to bring people together; thus,

if beliefs are seen as creating separation, they are discarded as non-functional. In addition, this seeming discrepancy emphasizes the need to keep in mind the self-reported aspect of this data and theory, and the focus on personal beliefs. It may be that individuals' religious beliefs function to connect people, but that the structure and theology of religious institutions can, at times, create barriers.

Functions of Fate Beliefs. These beliefs served to explain and give meaning to occurrences in life. In addition, belief in fate through a higher power seemed to provide comfort for some subjects, as if when something is predetermined one can believe that it is not necessarily a punishment for one's actions or inaction.

> I think there's a this was meant to happen, that gives a sense of meaning. If something happened it was meant to happen. If I don't get something I want then it wasn't meant to be....I think I just like to tell myself there's something bigger. Fate gives meaning. (6f)

> Fatalism also comforts in the face of misfortune....Well, it was meant to happen. That is why the tree fell on our house. People use it for comfort. And they also say like....if your relationship with Greg was meant to be, it was meant to be. But if it wasn't, it wasn't. And if it was meant to be it will happen in the future....You don't have to believe that it's, that something horrible is out to get you. (FU1m1)

Functions of Supernatural Occurrences Beliefs. Connecting supernatural occurrences to religion or spirituality seemed primarily to function as a way to explain the unexplainable. No reason was given by subjects for why these topics were discussed.

Functions of Belief Systems. It is difficult to determine what a system of beliefs does for an individual. This aspect of the theory is

more intuitive, and based more on integration following data analysis than on direct verbalizations by the subjects. However, four hypotheses are suggested by the data. The first is that belief systems are a way to understand or explain occurrences in life. This theme is recurrent in the functions of specific content domains (see above, e.g. Higher Power, Creation, Fate). It seems important for some individuals to have an explanation of why things happen to them, as well as explaining their foundations and ultimate destiny:

> I think I'd go insane not believing in something, because how can you explain things that are just unexplainable? (5f2)

> Most religions got started because people didn't know how to explain their environment. (1f1)

Belief systems also appeared to provide hope. Subjects seemed to exhibit a need to believe in something better and more just than the present world and social organization:

> He [God] gives you hope. Like if I had to live in a world full of those kind of people [atheists] it would be like a really gloomy world. It like gives you hope....If you had to choose between two people, like being in their presence, like you get such a negative from one person, that one that doesn't believe in anything and the one that believes in love and emotion and God, and just believes in everything, you know, you just feel good. (8f4)

Belief systems also functioned for some individuals as a way to organize their lives, and provide structure and rules to follow in their daily living. This seemed to be especially true for people who had strong beliefs supported by a religious organization.

> I think it [religious beliefs] structures their [believing Jews] life a lot. Like their life is ruled around religion and they go to temple every morning and on Saturday they don't cook and they don't tear paper because, you know, you can't create or destroy anything. So that religion comes first, and I can't say that life comes second, but life is structured by religion. (7f)

Belief systems that were extremely rigid and without a questioning attitude may also serve as a way to justify or support power or judgments. These beliefs tend to create a close ingroup that includes decisive and usually negative judgment of others outside the ingroup. This type of belief system may fulfill a need for superiority, cover up personal insecurity by elevating oneself at the expense of others, or fulfill a need to control others. In addition, this type of belief system may fulfill a need for certainty and leadership, by providing an authority to follow with surety.

> This was a fascinating interview: a real believer. God is in every aspect of her life. But there's very little questioning and I think that made me uncomfortable--a certain dogmatism. I think I felt like she was trying to convert me or control me....I hoped she would not ask about my beliefs. I think [I hoped that] because of the judgment aspect and wanting spirituality to bring us together, not erect barriers. I felt apprehensive, a flash of "what if she's right, she's so convinced." I wondered if her certainty made her feel superior. This seems to be implied in the idea that she will go to Heaven while others who doubt will not. (experimental log, interview 9)

Influences on Development of Beliefs

Some of the data collected seemed relevant to the topic of religious and spiritual beliefs but did not seem to suggest content or function domains. These data appeared to be more indicative of

influences on why people believed, although it may be the case that these influences also reflect certain content or function domains. Because influences were not specifically explored in this study these data are presented only as possibilities and are not meant to be interpreted as an exhaustive or representative investigation of possible influences.

Many subjects referred to their upbringing and family when discussing their religious belief. Subjects reflected that if they were taught to have spiritual beliefs, they were more likely to retain some belief system. It may be that this influence domain is related to the domain of connectedness, and that maintaining a connection to their families of origin led subjects to embrace or reject certain beliefs.

> My own personal background would point towards believing than not believing, because it's been an issue in my family, as opposed, let's say someone else with parents who say it's not even an issue, it's nothing to do with the way the person grows up. Perhaps they would lean towards not believing in God much easier than believing because of the way they were brought up. So that would tell me that a lot of it [my beliefs] has to do with how I was brought up....I guess I'm given the teachings. I see how they a`ffect those who gave me the teachings, and I view my parents...I see how it affects them and if I see it as being positive then I don't see why I wouldn't want to be curious about it....I've seen the people who presented it to me, it's been positive and therefore that is something I would like to strive towards. (3m)

> He [my father] always said there is a God but how you worship Him is your own right. And I think that affected me a lot. I look up to my father a lot and I think that probably made a great impression on me when I was younger and [it was] something I always kept in the back of my mind. (10m)

Two other domains of influence seem to be related to maintaining a consistent world view. Subjects discussed cultural mores and situational variables, and the degree of scientism as influences on their beliefs. Individuals felt that whether the culture supported beliefs and whether the political structure of the religious organizations they had been exposed to was judged by them to be positive or negative, directly influenced their beliefs:

> I resented people telling me that if I didn't go to church I'd go to Hell....I thought that...if you're a good person than why? So that's why I stepped away from the church because I think that the church has a lot of holes in it. (4f?)

In addition, several subjects mentioned a lack of beliefs or a questioning of beliefs as related to being empirically minded and unwilling to believe something without physical evidence. These subjects were less willing to turn to religion to explain what science could not, and in some cases turned to science to explain religious phenomena (e.g. 6f described near death experiences of Heaven or light as the brain's creating a hallucination to fulfill the psychological need for continued existence[7]). These subjects also appeared to have a greater tolerance for ambiguity, in that they stated that not knowing was not at all uncomfortable for them:

> I don't believe in spirits because [of]... my view of the way the world works....I believe in science, I believe in

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[7]This interview had technical difficulties in the recording equipment that made it difficult to transcribe some sections word for word. This interview was transcribed by the experimenter immediately after the interview, using the faulty tape where possible and personal recall to detail content areas where the tape was faulty. Thus, although the description of this explanation was on tape, and some words were distinguishable, a direct quote was not decipherable.

evolution, and I believe that things work a certain way and that I don't see how things like spirits could fit in to all of that. (5f1)

Subject: I think I would like to leave room for the possibility that everything has a logical reason, even though I don't know that, I'd rather not claim that something is out of my control in ways that can't be determined....I guess people would rather have an explanation. I don't need that.

Interviewer: You think you have a better tolerance for not knowing?

Subject: Yes. (6f)

Summary of Results

Review of Results

The purpose of this study was to produce a grounded theory describing the contents and functions of religious beliefs. Previous research on religion had defined religious beliefs a priori, and primarily in terms of Judeo-Christian theology. As is always likely with approaches predicated on a priori assumptions, this method may have restricted the discovery of what actually constitutes freely expressed beliefs and the purposes those beliefs serve from the believer's point of view. The theory described here was derived through flexible method research; it is therefore more likely that various religious beliefs should fit into this structure. Not all belief systems will include all of the content or function domains presented but the major content and function domains of any given belief system should reflect the structure described here. Thus, an individual may have beliefs about a higher power, but not have beliefs about creation, or beliefs concerning a higher power may

address feelings of isolation but may not function as a way to avoid responsibility for action. If the theory is comprehensive, no belief system should be found, regardless of theology or culture, that contains major content or function domains that are not described here; future research is needed to investigate the validity of this theory.

Seven major content domains were suggested by the data: (a) beliefs about a higher power, (b) beliefs about creation, (c) beliefs about the soul, (d) beliefs about life after death, (e) beliefs concerning one's connection with others, (f) beliefs about fate, and (g) beliefs about supernatural occurrences. Many of these domains were further divided into subdomains reflecting themes that appeared relevant to the overall domain. Function domains were described for each of the content domains, as well as for belief systems as a whole. In addition, some data appeared to reflect influences on the formation of beliefs, rather than content or function domains. Although developing a structure of influences was not a stated purpose of the present study, four influence domains appeared repeatedly in the data and were therefore described.

The structure which seemed to characterize the data is represented in the diagram below (see Figure 1, page 93). Content and function domains are presented separately. The relative size of each content domain approximates the relative importance and magnitude of the content domain, as shown in the data through the number of subdomains into which a domain is divided, the number of subjects who discussed the domain, and the amount of detail subjects provided for the domain. The size of the function domains

reflect the size of the content domains. Interaction between domains are represented by arrows. Content and function domains interact bi-directionally. The content of belief obviously affects the function, e.g. only one who believes in a higher power could have the function of combatting isolation through that belief. However, function can also affect content. A specific function may be so important that a belief is accepted or rejected on the basis of whether it meets that function. Each individual content domain influences the content of the belief system, as each individual function domain influences the function of the belief system. However the content and function of the belief system may not be composed solely of the individual content and function domains: thus, the whole may be equal to more than the sum of its parts. One reason for this may be the effects of influences or religious practices or experiences. The belief system is affected by influences in the person's life; an example of this is the Japanese woman described above, who felt that the emphasis on unity in her culture made it less necessary for her to seek unity through religious beliefs. Because this study did not explicitly explore influences on beliefs, the directionality and specific effects of influence on content and function domains are unknown. Similarly, while it makes intuitive sense that an interaction exists between religious beliefs and religious practices or experiences, this study did not investigate this interaction and no definitive statement can be made about the interaction effects. As shown in the diagram, influences and religious experiences or practices most likely affect the belief system as a whole, but these variables may also interact with specific content and function domains.

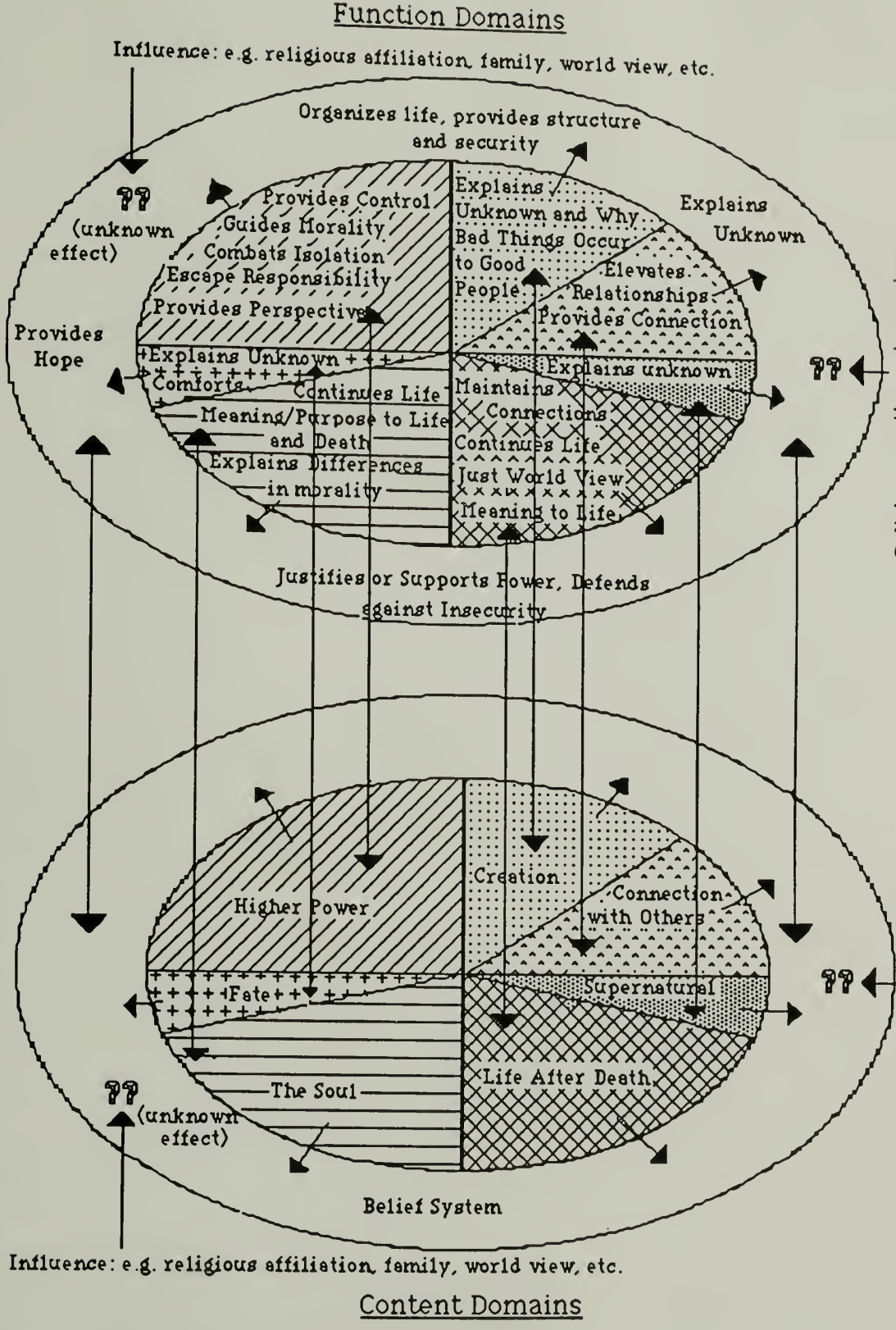

Figure 1. Content and Function Domains and Interactions

Structured Interview

Theory building is essentially creating a set of interrelated statements grounded in data for the purpose of addressing some larger question. These statements are most accurately recognized as hypotheses or questions that should then be addressed through additional descriptive, relational or experimental research. The aim of the present research may thus be seen as generating a number of statements that may be reframed as questions and then organized into a measure to be used in a further program of research. The idea that questions are underlying the theory was reflected in the method of data analysis, as it seemed that the most efficient way to conceptualize the theory was in terms of the questions that unified the particular answers evident in the data. Thus, when summarizing the results, it may be most useful to present an outline of these questions. This outline is presented here as a structured interview that may be used in future research concerning the content and function of religious beliefs. A structured interview would allow the researcher to explore the language of the respondent; the descriptive data gathered could then be used to construct a questionnaire.

Instructions. Introduce the subject to the theme of the interview, emphasizing that the interest is on the subject's personal beliefs, as opposed to their views of organized religion, or the theology associated with their religious affiliation. Encourage subjects to elaborate on their answers. Discuss briefly the language difficulty of using terms that are not culturally biased. Encourage subjects to interpret words with broad meanings and to inquire if they have any doubt about the meaning or a word or phrase.

Questions other than those listed here should be asked only in order to qualify statements made by the subjects.

Content Questions. Text in parentheses are instructions for the interviewer or examples that may be read to the subject for illustrative purposes.

I. Higher Power

A. Do you believe in a higher power of any sort? (If no, go to II.)

B. What is the nature of that higher power? (Ask this general question, then ask any of the questions below that were not answered.)

1. How do you define this higher power; what is its character or defining characteristics?

2. Is this higher power separate from you, or from the rest of the universe?

3. Are there sub-powers, like angels, or prophets who interact for the higher power?

4. Do you believe in an opposite higher power, e.g. if you believe in God, do you also believe in a devil? What is the nature of that opposite higher power?

C. Is there a connection between the individual and the higher power? (If no, go to I.D.)

1. What is the nature and extent of this connection? (Ask this general question, then ask any of the questions below that were not answered.)

2. How much does this higher power control your actions?

3. Is the connection with a higher power something you can influence (e.g. through meditation to connect, or through prayer to communicate)?

4. Are there certain correct or incorrect ways to maintain a connection with this higher power?

D. How personal is this higher power, is your higher power the same as everyone else's e.g. is there only one higher power called by different names or worshipped in different ways?

II. Creation

A. How do you explain creation? (If a higher power is not mentioned in relation to creation, go to II.C.)

B. What is the nature of the higher power's involvement with creation? (Ask this general question, then ask any of the questions below that were not answered.)

1. Did it create everything or just some things, or just guide the process of creation?

2. How much investment does the higher power have in its creation, how much does it oversee what happens with its creation, i.e. in this world?

3. Are we (this world) the only one of its creations?

C. Who created who, did man create God or God create man?

III. The Soul

A. Do you believe in a soul, or something like a soul? (If no, go to IV.)

B. What is the nature of the soul?

1. What is the nature of the relationship, if any, between your personality/individuality and your soul?

2. What is the relationship of the soul to the afterlife and the body?

3. Does the soul remember this life, after death?

C. Are human beings the only creatures who possess souls?

D. Where did your soul come from?

IV. Life after death

A. Do you believe in life after death? (If no, go to V.)

B. What is the nature of life after death?

C. What effect does how you live now have on your afterlife?

1. Is there a difference between what happens to good people and what happens to bad people?

2. Does a higher power judge you and determine your life after death, or is it somehow up to you?

3. How much do your present beliefs about the afterlife shape what it will be like?

V. Connection with Others

A. Do you relate your connection or relationships with other people to your spiritual or religious beliefs in any way? (If no, go to VI.)

B. Is feeling connected with others as individuals, not necessarily as a cultural identity, but in terms of understanding and loving others a part of this connection?

1. What is the nature of this connection with individuals? (Ask this general question, then ask the question below if it was not answered.)

2. Do you relate this to a connection between souls in any way? (If yes ask:) What is the nature of this connection?

C. Do your beliefs connect you with a group, a cultural identity (e.g. Judaism), or an ideal of overall unity between peoples of the world? (If yes ask:) What is the nature of this connection?

D. Do your beliefs include ideas about how you should interact with others (e.g. do unto others as you would have them do unto you, be a good person, etc.)?

VI. Fate

A. Do you believe in fate? (If no, go to VII.)

B. What is your definition of fate?

C. What is the distinction or relationship between fate and a higher power?

VII. Supernatural Occurrences

A. Do supernatural occurrences happen?

B. How do you explain supernatural occurrences?

C. Do you connect supernatural occurrences such as ghosts, dreams, prophecy, ESP, with spiritual or religious beliefs? (If yes ask:) What is the nature of this connection?

Function Questions. Function questions need to address not only whether the content belief serves a specific function, but also how it does this. Thus, each of these questions, should be followed by the question "How does this occur?" or "Please describe."

I. Higher Power

A. Does your belief (or non-belief) in a higher power help to guide you into moral action? (Ask the questions below if the subject believes in a higher power, and if they have not been answered in response to this question.)

1. Does your belief in a higher power provide an ideal towards which to strive?

2. Does your belief in the judgment of a higher power affect your actions? Does this help you believe that good people will be rewarded while bad people will be punished?

B. Does your belief (or non-belief) in a higher power help you to feel accepted, cared for or less alone?

C. Does your belief in a higher power help you to avoid responsibility or provide something to blame when negative things occur? (Ask if subject believes in a higher power.)

D. Does your belief (or non-belief) in a higher power help you feel that things are more controllable? (Ask the questions below if they are not answered in response to this question.)

1. Does this belief (or non-belief) give meaning to occurrences in life? (e.g. if the subject believes in a higher power, through the belief in a plan or reason that the higher power knows of)

2. Does this belief (or non-belief) help you feel more in control? e.g. (for believers) by providing you with a way to effect seemingly uncontrollable events (e.g. through prayer)? e.g. (for non-believers) by providing you with a belief that only you control what happens to you?

E. Does this belief (or non-belief) help you give meaning to life through being able to put things into better perspective or better understand your role in the scheme of things?

II. Creation

A. Does your understanding of creation help explain the unexplained?

B. Does this belief help you understand your role in life and your foundations?

C. Does believing in a distant or nonexistent higher power help you to explain why bad things happen to good people?

III. Soul (Ask these questions only if the subject believes in a soul.)

A. Does belief in the soul help provide meaning to life (e.g. the soul has a goal)?

B. Does belief in the soul help to provide meaning to death (e.g. one has achieved the goal of the soul and is therefore ready to die)?

C. Does belief in the soul help to explain differences between people in morality, personality, or goodness?

D. Does belief in the soul provide a belief in something to live on, that does not die?

IV. Life after Death (Ask these questions only if the subject believes in an afterlife.)

A. Does belief in an afterlife provide a way to ensure life continuing? Is it difficult to imagine not existing, to think of a final end?

B. Does belief in an afterlife help you by providing a way to maintain continued connection with loved ones after they, or you, have died?

C. Does belief in an afterlife help you to believe that the world is just, in that people will ultimately be rewarded or punished for their actions?

D. Does belief in an afterlife give purpose, meaning, or direction to your life?

V. Connection with Others

A. Does connecting your relationships with others to your spiritual or religious beliefs help to give meaning to relationships, or to see them as blessed in some way? (Ask only if subject makes this connection.)

B. Do your religious or spiritual beliefs (or lack of these beliefs) connect you with others? In what way is this important to you?

VI. Fate

A. Does belief (or non-belief) in fate help you explain or give meaning to occurrences in life?

B. Does your belief (or non-belief) in fate help to comfort you in times of misfortune?

VII. Supernatural Occurrences

Does your explanation of supernatural occurrences help you to explain them?

VII. Functions of Belief Systems

A. Does your belief system help you to understand or explain your life, your beginnings or your ultimate destiny?

B. Does your belief system help you feel hope?

C. Does your belief system help you to organize your life or create rules to follow?

D. Does your belief system enable you to feel secure, superior or in control? Do you think you are right? Does it provide an ultimate authority to follow with surety?

Influence Questions. Below are some suggested questions regarding influences. As this was not a fully-explored area of this study, these questions are not representative of the possible areas of interest.

I. Upbringing

Do you feel that your upbringing or family had a large impact on what you believe?

II. Cultural mores and situational variables

Do you feel that the culture you were brought up in affected the beliefs you presently hold in any way?

Do you feel that your experiences with organized religion affected the beliefs you presently hold in any way?

III. Empiricism

Do you feel that you are empirically minded? Does this empiricism affect your belief system?

Closing. It is important to determine whether this structure is valid and unbiased by subject age, or cultural or religious background. Thus, some additional, more open-ended questions should be included to close the interview.

I. Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you feel is a part of your religious or spiritual beliefs (or your atheism or agnosticism)?

II. Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you feel your beliefs (or lack of beliefs) do for you?

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

One of the most difficult aspects of attempting to construct a theory that would transcend particular cultures or theologies was finding unbiased language to define the domains that would reflect the data. All of the interviews were conducted in English, and this is the primary language of the experimenter. Language serves as a way to communicate; words are useful to the extent that they have a common, agreed upon referent. It is difficult to find words whose referents are not influenced by the culture in which the language is developed and used. Finding language that would be applicable to varied ideas was thus quite difficult, and some imagination and insightful translation may need to be used when applying this theory to non-English, non-Judeo-Christian cultures. It is certain that the language influenced these results.

The developmental stage of the subjects, as well as the language, may have had an effect on the results. College students were used as it was believed that individuals at this age are more likely to be actively questioning their beliefs. This questioning entails exploring and evaluating a variety of different beliefs in order to form a more coherent belief system. It was felt that interviewing subjects at this age would reveal a greater amount of variation. This hypothesis is supported by Perry's (1970) work which found that college students investigate many possibilities as they learn to negotiate a pluralistic world. Thus, it was hoped that the developmental stage of the subjects would lead to a more inclusive,

generalizable theory through including more variability in the data used to construct the theory. However, it is possible that the homogeneity of developmental stage could lead to overlooking some content or function domains. This may be especially true for function domains, as the self-reported functions of beliefs would logically be related to the present needs of the individuals reporting; the needs of college students may differ substantially from the needs of the elderly, for instance. Only future research on the validity of the theory can address whether there are biases in the theory because of the language or developmental stage of the subjects used here.

In light of the possible language and age biases it may have been better to have attempted to control subject composition. One way this could have been done is to interview people throughout the life cycle, people from different cultures (such as recent immigrants or exchange students), and to control for the variables of present religious affiliation and background. Although flexible method research is not descriptive and therefore does not require a representative sample, controlling for these variables would have better insured the generalizability of the theory.

In addition, controlling group composition could have elicited somewhat different data, and would definitely have provided more concrete information about the use of focus groups. Thus, forming some homogeneous groups in terms of religious affiliation or background, and some groups that contained members who were not in agreement (e.g. people with a stated religious affiliation and belief system, people who had developed a personal spirituality, and

people who were atheistic or agnostic) would have allowed an analysis of the effects of homogeneity of group composition. Similarly, forming groups that were homogeneous in terms of gender and groups that were not would have allowed an analysis of gender effects. Controlling the variables of age and culture in group composition would have provided further information on focus group methodology.

The results of this study indicate that various external influences directly affect the content and function of religious beliefs. This study could have been expanded in order to better investigate the role of influences. General questions addressing what influenced beliefs, as well as questions addressing specific influences suggested here such as family beliefs and cohesiveness, experience with an organized religion, cultural variables and consistency with the subjects' world view would have facilitated investigation of the interaction between beliefs and the experience of the believer. This could have contributed to integrating the structure of the content and function of religious beliefs into the larger context of family and society. There appeared to be some connection between function and influences, as both seemed to affect the adoption or rejection of beliefs. Directly addressing influences on beliefs would have enabled a clearer understanding of the interactions and distinction between influence and function.

This study could also have been expanded to address changes in religious beliefs. At least one subject (1m1) stated that he had changed his beliefs during the process of the interview. This subject did not believe in a higher power but originally stated that he did

believe in a soul and reincarnation. However, he appeared to pride himself on his empiricism. As he was questioned (by other subjects in the group as well as by the researcher) he came to believe that his belief in reincarnation was irrational, and served as a crutch to avoid reality. This subject stated:

> To be honest with you, I will probably leave this room and I will never say that I believe that there's a soul, unless somebody can prove it to me, now that I've talked about it....It [saying I believe in something I can't prove] makes me feel like I'm weak because I can't believe in reality. (1m1)

It would have been interesting to investigate whether a change in beliefs occurred with other subjects and what caused the change. It is likely that change is related to function as well as influence. This change may have occurred during the initial interview or over the next several months. Further encouraging subjects to return for the follow-up interview would have allowed this possibility to be explored. Perhaps requiring subjects who participated in the initial interviews to return, or offering a cash incentive for returning could have increased the amount of subjects in the follow-up interviews. This would not only have allowed investigation of the change question, but also provided more support for the validity of the theory.

In evaluating the domains themselves, it is interesting to note that some domains were mentioned more often, and with more detail than others. The content domains of the higher power, the soul, and life after death were given the most attention in interviews, whereas the content domains of creation, fate and supernatural occurrences

were mentioned by fewer subjects and with less detail and definition. Consequently, these latter domains had fewer subdomains within them. In addition, there were more function subdomains for beliefs in the higher power and life after death than for other content domains. The relative frequency and detail may indicate differing degrees of importance. The greater amount of support for some domains may also be related to cultural or age bias. Future research could address whether a difference exists between different religious theologies in terms of the importance placed on some domains as opposed to others. For example, the Judeo-Christian tradition places great emphasis on the idea of God, and it would thus be expected that people from this tradition would have more detailed beliefs in this domain. In contrast, the Buddhist tradition places more emphasis on the idea that all is one, and thus the domain of connection to others, or the lack of barriers between self and others may have more emphasis.

Some of the function domains appeared to be more important than others in terms of how much they affected one's beliefs. For example, it was noted above that subjects who saw religious beliefs as separating people, as opposed to connecting them, were more likely to reject religious beliefs. This may mean that some functions are more important than others or that the function is more important than the belief. Thus, if religious beliefs do not appear to serve these functions, the beliefs are discarded in favor of some more secular system that will serve the function. In light of this possibility, it is interesting to question the place of atheism in contrast to belief. Perhaps atheism is a belief system in that it

serves the same functions that beliefs serve. Subjects who feel that beliefs separate individuals may see atheism as a way to maintain a connection with all people in the world, not just those with similar beliefs. A further example of how atheism can serve the same functions as a belief system is the subject who stated that she preferred to not believe in God because she was unwilling to give control to something other than herself (6f); this subject's atheism served a control function similar to that served by belief in God for some other subjects. In addition, individuals may modify their beliefs in order to serve certain functions. For example, people who discover that a belief in a controlling God affects their need for control and free will may retain a belief in God, but modify that belief so that God gives man free will, or God is distant. Research on changes in beliefs and the reason behind these changes could explore whether it is the functions that determine the belief (or lack thereof) or vice versa.

The domains described above have some obvious interactions with each other. For instance, it is readily apparent that the domain of the soul is related to the domain of life after death, in that the soul is the part of oneself which continues to live on after the body's death. However, there may be some more subtle interactions between some domains. Creation and life after death are both related to the idea of time and to viewing life as a continuum; creation addresses the beginning of this continuum while life after death addresses the end, or the later stages (FU1m2). Thus, another question for further research on beliefs concerns the obvious and subtle connections between domains.

The method used here investigated the personal belief of individuals as opposed to the doctrines and theologies of organized religion. An important difference may exist between personal beliefs and organized religion. It is this researcher's opinion that personal beliefs had much greater variability than the doctrines of organized religion. People who state similar religious affiliations may have differences in their personal beliefs. For example, two Christians may both believe in God, but one may believe in a controlling, involved God who is intimately connected with humanity, while the other may believe in a distant God who does not affect life or dictate ways of worship. These differences may have an impact on the functions of the beliefs and the way the individual interacts with the world. One possibility noted above is that organized religion may contribute to barriers through the creation of ingroups and outgroups, whereas personal dialogue about beliefs may reveal a striking similarity between two people who are affiliated with different religions, thus serving to connect rather than separate them.

The theory presented here provides a new context within which to examine previous theoretical and empirical work on religion. Freud's theories on the function of religion were supported, for the most part, by this work. Freud (1964) saw religion as a way to provide control and to defend against the power of nature, faith and death. Religious beliefs do indeed appear to provide control, and to ensure continuance of life. Freud (1964) also viewed religion as compensating for the suffering imposed by civilization. The function domain dealing with the afterlife providing a reward for suffering on

earth reflects Freud's belief in religion as compensation. What was not evident in the results of this study was Freud's (1964) view that religion taught people not to question. Most of the subjects in this study were very actively questioning, evaluating and criticizing possible beliefs and ideas about religion and spirituality. These subjects often expressed doubt, and acknowledged the leap of faith that their beliefs required. However, this faith was not unquestioned or irrational. Beliefs that were evaluated as serving positive functions were retained, while others were discarded. While it is true that most of these beliefs rested on no empirical data or proof, there was nothing to support the idea that the beliefs were neurotic, or that they affected the rational, critical thinking of the believers. There was one subject who was a possible exception to this positive trend, and who may provide some support for Freud's theories (9f). Much of this subject's belief system was taken almost verbatim from Biblical material. She did not appear to critically question her beliefs and dismissed anything that contradicted them. For example, she believed in Adam and Eve and definitively dismissed the theory of evolution, believing that Darwin had made a mistake, and if he had lived longer he would have discovered this. When asked whether there was any part of her theology that she doubted, she answered that there was not. This type of belief appears to support some of Freud's objections to religious beliefs, as critical thinking and evaluation is not encouraged. However, this woman's beliefs were not personalized as the other subjects' were. It may be that people with beliefs that are definitive and unquestioned may support Freud's fears that religion contributes to teaching people not to think

critically or doubt, but it appears that believers do not necessarily suffer these negative effects of believing.

Thus, it appears that religious beliefs may have positive or negative effects, as proposed by Jung (1938) and Fromm (1950). Fromm's theorizing about two types of religion may be one way to evaluate the difference between subjects who questioned and personalized their beliefs and those who did not. Some beliefs may serve more authoritarian functions, while others may serve more humanistic functions. On the whole, the humanistic view of religious beliefs was much more evident in these data. The self-reported nature of the data on which this theory was based should be emphasized here. It is not likely that an individual would state that their beliefs had major negative consequences for them, or that the negative consequences outweighed the positive. Authoritarian religion is viewed as very negative by Fromm and thus may be less likely to be revealed through self-report. However, this researcher saw little support for authoritarian religion in the tone, feeling or content of the interviews. Perhaps we, as a society, are moving towards more tolerant, healthy religious views.

The theory described here found much to support the views of object relations theorists. The content and function domains addressing connection with others are direct evidence for religious beliefs serving as a way to connect individuals to others in their lives. In addition, many of the subdomains involving the higher power, and life after death also relate to the need for connection. The higher power served the function of combating isolation, and a connection to a higher power seemed quite important to many

individuals. One of the primary functions of life after death was to ensure continued connection with others. Perhaps Guntrip was correct when he stated:

> It used to be argued that in pre-scientific times men invented religion because of their 'powerlessness' in the face of nature; and science has altered all that. But it is not 'powerlessness' that is the real problem, but isolation, loneliness, the sense of personal unreality, the answer to which is 'personal relationship', all the way from the infant's need of the mother to the adult's experience of this extraordinary universe in which our life is set. (Guntrip, 1969, p. 332)

Perhaps this emphasis on connectedness is part of what makes these religious beliefs more positive or humanitarian, and less dogmatic or neurotic.

The beliefs of the majority of subjects in this study reflected Allport's conceptualization of mature religious sentiment. The theory presented here reflects beliefs that are well-differentiated and complex, comprehensive, and integrated into other aspects of life. The functions that these beliefs served for subjects also seemed to reflect this conceptualization, in terms of directing a consistent morality (e.g. God as providing a role model, beliefs ensuring a just world, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, etc.). While subjects may not "find their master motive in religion" (Allport & Ross, 1967, p. 434) their beliefs were not "lightly held" (Allport & Ross, 1967 p. 434). Allport's extrinsic religious orientation is more negative than the intrinsic orientation, having been correlated with prejudice, dogmatism, and guilt. This study provokes some questions about the definitions of extrinsic and intrinsic religion and their

effects on believers. Allport (Allport & Ross, 1967) defines beliefs that are selectively shaped to fit more primary needs as extrinsic. However, it seems that many subjects evaluated their beliefs in this way; this does not necessarily mean that these believers are less mature in their religious sentiment, or less emotionally healthy. In fact one may hypothesize, in light of Perry's (1970) work on stages of intellectual and ethical development, that people who evaluate their beliefs to serve certain functions may be more mature or healthy. In Perry's view, religion that has been evaluated and consciously chosen is more mature. The scale that Allport developed to test extrinsic versus intrinsic orientation seems to address the practice and attitude towards religion, as opposed to the content or function of an individual's *beliefs*. Perhaps, in light of the theory presented here, Allport's definitions of intrinsic and extrinsic could be refined, at least as they apply to beliefs and not practice or experience of religion. As most dimensional studies of religion were founded on definitions similar to Allport's, there may be a need to reevaluate many of these dimensional studies, separating personal beliefs, theology, practice, and experience as opposed to combining them all under the one heading "religion."

The research on dimensions of religion could be reassessed in terms of its applicability to beliefs, specifically. Do beliefs reflect the intrinsic, extrinsic and consensual dimensions proposed by Fleck (1976)? Are there committed or intrinsic beliefs that reflect perspective, flexibility and commitment, as opposed to consensual beliefs serving primarily as a personality support and characterized by shallow, conformist thinking, as opposed to extrinsic beliefs that

are adhered to primarily for social acceptance and status? Applying these dimensional concepts to beliefs would also serve to better define the differences and similarities between beliefs, practice and experience. The dimensional work of Allen and Spilka (1967) would be especially relevant, in terms of this theory, as their work focused on the cognitive dimensions of religion, which one would expect to find primarily in beliefs, as opposed to experience or practice. Whether beliefs can be divided into committed or consensual beliefs on the basis of content, clarity, complexity, flexibility, and importance would be an interesting research question. In addition, investigating whether certain domains were more important to this distinction than others could inform researchers about the interaction between domains.

The theories concerning the function of religion and religious beliefs have found empirical support in this study. Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick's (1985) application of attribution theory to religion seems to be quite valid. Religious beliefs do indeed appear to make things meaningful, serve a need to predict or control events, and protect, maintain or enhance one's self-esteem or self-concept (Spilka et al. 1985). Kivley's (1988) theory on the content and function of beliefs was also supported here. Religious beliefs do serve a function of relational orientation, connecting individuals. Domains of beliefs do reflect whether beliefs encourage trust and independence, contribute to moral consistency, and help to maintain a consistent world view. Kivley's (1988) theorizing contrasted healthy religious beliefs with unhealthy beliefs. Future research could use the domains presented here to investigate what content domains, or

what types of answers to content or function domain questions, reflect healthy or unhealthy views.

Qualitative research is often used as the first step in a program of research. This is because qualitative research answers only the "what" question, and inevitably leads to more descriptive and relational questions. Much of what has been discussed above suggests directions for future research, and there are many more questions that could be explored. The first step would be to gather some descriptive data on the domains, possibly using the structured interview presented in the summary of results above. The data from interviews could be coded, and more refined questions could be developed. For instance, the question what is the nature of the higher power may elicit answers such as a controlling God, an energy or force, a distant God, a consciousness within everything. This domain could then be represented by a multiple choice question. This type of question would make collecting descriptive, representational data much easier. Refining the domains into more quantifiable questions would also make it possible to begin to explore relations between domains: are certain domains connected to others, e.g. if one believes in the domain of a higher power does that make it more likely that one believes in a soul? In addition, tracking changes in beliefs over time would be easier with a more quantitative questionnaire.

The theory presented here also provides a structure from which to begin investigating the interaction of religious beliefs with other variables. How do religious beliefs interact with other values such as the work ethic, or family values? Are there personality

aspects associated with certain content or function domains of religious beliefs? What is the relationship between religious beliefs and positive or negative family experiences?

The influence domains suggested by this study provide a starting point from which to begin investigating what makes people believe or not believe. As stated above, it is possible, for example, that the reasons behind adopting or rejecting beliefs are affected by the perceived functions that the beliefs serve. The theory developed here provides a structure within which to investigate this question. In addition, it may be that different content domains are influenced to different degrees by different things. Thus, a close family which believes in God may foster a belief in a higher power, but beliefs about connection with others may be less important as this function is served in a secular manner.

It may also be possible to develop a stage theory of development of religious beliefs. Are some beliefs adopted before others? Are some functions filled first, and then as the belief system develops and expands, other functions become evident and beliefs are adopted to address these functions? Integrating a stage theory of religious beliefs with Perry's (1970) work on intellectual and ethical development may be a way to begin this investigation and give it a larger context. Are some content or function domains more likely to be seen when an individual is in a dualistic stance, while others emerge only as the individual begins to deal with the relativism of the world?

From a clinical perspective, the most important aspects of this theory are the ways in which it may be used to inform therapy, and

the ways in which beliefs affect mental health or pathology. Kivley (1988), Fromm (1950), Bergin (1983, 1991) and others have begun to address the interaction of religion and mental health. This theory provides a structure that can be used to begin to determine which beliefs affect mental health in what ways. As most people have some sort of religious beliefs, an understanding of the content and function of these beliefs may enable us to find ways to integrate them into clinical theory and practice (Spilka, 1986). Most theories of therapy and psychological development (with the notable exception of object relations) do not address religion, or view it only as an indicator of neuroses or pathology. But the vast majority of Americans believe in a higher power (Gallup, 1987), and not all of these people can be pathological. Understanding the content and function of religious beliefs may enable us to integrate beliefs and the development of a belief system into our understanding of psychological development. The functions served by religious beliefs may be important, general needs of human beings:

> If, however, we dismiss all religion because there is such a thing as neurotic religion, we are on dangerous ground, for there are also neurotic forms of politics, of art, of marriage....We cannot dismiss anything simply because it can be neurotic, for neurosis is simply the disturbed and anxious expression of normal and ineradicable human needs, a distorted expression of human truth. (Guntrip, 1969, p. 323)

Understanding how religious beliefs meet the needs of individuals will better enable us to help patients to use religion as a resource to meet needs. In addition, religious beliefs may be just one way to

meet these needs. Recognizing these needs through the investigation of religious beliefs can foster a better understanding of human needs in general. We may then be able to begin to hypothesize about other ways to meet these needs that would be useful in therapy.

Understanding the content and functions of religious beliefs could also break down the reluctance to address religious issues in therapy. Since the majority of people have some religious beliefs, understanding and integrating these beliefs into therapy can only help us to better serve our patients:

> Purely secular psychotherapy may be alien to these people's [believers'] way of thinking, and they may prefer approaches that are sympathetic to spiritual values. It may be this gap [between psychology and religion] that causes people in distress to prefer counsel from clergy to counsel from mental health professionals. (Bergin, 1991, p. 396)

Fromm (1950) saw many similarities between therapy and humanitarian religion. Realizing that religious beliefs may serve many of the same functions that therapy attempts to address (e.g. control, comfort, organization in life, understanding, connection to others) may enable therapists to view religious beliefs as a possible resource in patients' lives (Bergin, 1991; Spilka, 1986).

> The most significant contribution of a spiritual perspective is the view that there is a spiritual reality and that spiritual experiences make a difference in behavior. The spirit of God or divine intelligence can influence the identity, agency, and life-style of human beings. (Bergin, 1991, p. 398)

Understanding the content and functions of religious beliefs can help us understand the ways in which the spiritual perspective affects behavior and self-concept. In contrast, some religious beliefs may, indeed, be pathological (Spilka, 1986), and having a structure from which to investigate content and function may facilitate differentiating pathological beliefs from healthy beliefs.

For years, psychology has viewed religion as a taboo subject. Religion has been dismissed as neurotic and unscientific. The result of this dismissal has been ignoring what could be a vital link to understanding the motivations and needs of human beings, and dismissing a possible resource in the attempt to help patients realize their full potential. Science is only a tool, and as such it can be used for good or ill, just as any other tool may be (Guntrip, 1969). As psychologists we are interested in understanding what determines the positive or negative use of a tool, and what determines the positive or negative effects of that use. As clinicians, we understand that certain values contribute to mental health or sickness, and thus our values affect the therapeutic process (Bergin, 1991, Strupp & Hadley, 1977). Spiritual values are directly related to mental health values in that "spiritual values help to root mental health values in terms of universals, and the spiritual perspective makes it easier to establish a moral frame of reference because it views the world in value-laden terms" (Bergin, 1991, p. 398). Thus, psychology and religion are not as separate as we have wanted to believe:

> We have to move beyond science into the realm of moral and spiritual values to find the forces that can control science: and then we are in the field of both mental

health and religion, and find the two cannot easily be separated. (Guntrip, 1969, p. 324)

APPPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT NOTICE

You are invited to take this opportunity to engage in creative discussion and sharing of ideas about religious and spiritual beliefs, and the role they play in our lives. Whether you belong to an organized religion, have your own personal spirituality or are agnostic or atheistic, I am interested in your views. Participants are needed to take part in group or individual interviews addressing the content, meaning and function of spiritual beliefs as the individual views them.

Individual interviews will run from 1 to 2 hours; group interviews will run for 2 hours. Participants will receive 2 credits.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

For Group Participants:

I understand that participation in this study involves discussing my religious and spiritual beliefs in a small group. I know that the themes of the discussion will be what my religious beliefs are, what they mean to me and the reasons why I hold these beliefs. I have been informed that the group interview will be tape-recorded, that only those people involved in transcribing or analyzing the data will have access to the transcripts and that the original tape-recordings will be erased after transcription. No identifying data will be included in the transcripts.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. My signature below indicates that any questions I had about this study have been answered and that I would like to participate in this study as it has been described to me.

NAME (please print)_____

SIGNATURE_____

DATE_____

For Individual Interviews:

I understand that participation in this study involves discussing my religious and spiritual beliefs, what they mean to me and the reasons why I hold these beliefs. I have been informed that my interview will be tape-recorded, that only those people involved in transcribing or analyzing the data will have access to the transcripts and that the original tape-recordings will be erased after transcription. No identifying data will be included in the transcripts.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. My signature below indicates that any questions I had about this study have been answered and that I would like to participate in this study as it has been described to me.

NAME (please print)_____

SIGNATURE_____

DATE_____

APPENDIX C: WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Thank you for participating in this study. Many people are religious or spiritual in some way and it is theorized that this thinking affects their daily living, their mental health, and any therapeutic experience they may be participating in. Because of this, I believe that it is important to develop an understanding of the content and importance of religious and spiritual beliefs on an individual level. With the information from you and others, I hope to be able to create a theory which is grounded in actual data addressing the meaning and function of religious beliefs within the individual. You are invited to take part in this theory building process by returning for a future follow-up session. Regardless of your future participation, your present input and presence are warmly appreciated.

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Do you feel that your beliefs explain things for you? (1G)[8]

Why do you believe or not believe what you do? (1G)

Do you think that religious or spiritual beliefs are necessary to understand life or to have a complete life philosophy? (1G)

What is the nature of your soul? (2I)

Why do you think your default is not God, as opposed to having your default be God? (2I)

What is the difference between the soul and the person [subject has been talking about the soul as not good or bad, it is the person that is]? (4G)

What do you think the beliefs you have now do for you? Do they help you in any way? (4G)

Would God exist if you didn't? (7I)

What do you think is the relationship between your God and somebody else's God? (7I)

You said earlier that you felt that part of your religion was the social part. Could you tell me a little about that? (7I)

What is the relationship with God like? (8G)

Do you think that God affects your life? (9I)

You said there are two ways out of here, Heaven and Hell. Tell me about life after death and Heaven and Hell. (9I)

Does God comfort you or help you? (9I)

Where does your soul come from? (10I)

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[8]This number designates the interview number and whether the interview was a group (G) or individual (I) interview.

Do you think that people are the only things with souls? (10I)

Why did you choose to believe in God? (10I)

You mentioned earlier a kind of feeling, feeling God when you were in touch with nature. Are there other times or things, situations, events, experiences, where you've felt particularly close to God? (10I)

Are there particular times when your beliefs are very important to you? (11G)

Do you think that when you die or when he died [subject had been discussing death of family member and the afterlife] that he kept who he is, that you're aware of who you are or who you were? (13I)

What do you think is the difference between you and someone who explains those things [e.g. creation] with religion? (13I)

APPENDIX E: OUTLINE FOR FOLLOW-UP GROUPS

Content

I. Higher Power

A. General

1. Nature of higher power.

e.g tripartite god, force, energy, all-powerful, good, relationship of higher power to love?

2. Is this higher power separate from you or a part of you?

a. as a personal ideal to strive towards

3. Are there sub-powers, like angels who interact for the higher power?

also encompasses Christ and Buddha, etc. in some minds as prophets or figures that interact with man for God

B. Connection between individual and higher power.

1. Nature and extent of connection with higher power.

e.g we are part of the higher power, the soul is part of it, we are it, it is separate but speaks to us, etc.

2. How much does this higher power control your actions?

interaction of higher power, control, and personal responsibility: higher power and the concept of free will

3. Is this connection something you can control?

a. is it something imposed on you or sought out by you, e.g. thru meditation, prayer

b. does this higher power answer prayers, can you communicate directly with it

4. How personal is this higher power, is your higher power the same as every one else's?

a. is the nature of this higher power different for each individual or just the understanding it; e.g. are all gods the same just called by a different name and understood in a different cultural context?

5. Does this higher power impose rules (this is connected to whether or not it judges, see life after death)?

a. does this higher power want to be worshipped- does it matter how

b. is there sin, according to this higher power

II. Creation

A. Do you look to a higher power to explain creation?

B. How much investment does the higher power have in its creation, how much does it oversee what happens with its creation, i.e. in this world?

C. Are we (this world) the only one of its creations?

D. Who created who, did man create God or god create man, did god create the earth or did the earth create god?

III. Soul

A. Nature of the soul., e.g. energy, force, personality

1. Nature of relationship between your personality/ individuality and your soul

how does your soul shape your personality or vice versa, are they the same thing, or different

2. Does the soul remember beyond this life

3. Do other animals have souls?

are there specific souls for specific species or could you have been a dog/cat/tree

B. Where did your soul come from?

e.g from god, or from a well of souls and did it exist before you were born?

C. Relationship of soul to body/afterlife.

does the soul continue to live after the body dies, what is the interaction or relationship of the soul to the body?

IV. Life after death

A. Nature of life after death, e.g. reincarnation, nature of heaven, meeting god, etc

1. Does your self-awareness continue after death? Does your individuality continue after death?

B. What effect does how you live now have on your afterlife?

1. Is there a difference between what happens to good people and what happens to bad people

2. Does a higher power judge you and determine your life after death, or is it somehow up to you?

C. How much do your beliefs shape what the afterlife is like

e.g. do you create your own heaven/hell, in life or after death or both.

V. Connection with Others

A. Feeling connected with others, not necessarily a cultural identity but understanding and loving others. this is related to do unto others...

1. Nature of soul connection

what effect or interaction does your soul have with other people, their souls, their personalities, do souls communicate, e.g one is meant to be with someone because a soul connection?

B. Beliefs creating an ingroup, a cultural identity (e.g. Judaism): belonging and an ideal of overall unity

C. Goodness: Do unto others as they do unto you as a part of spiritual beliefs that enables connection between people.

VI. Fate

What is fate: predestination and meaning to why things occur.

VII. Supernatural Occurrences

Do you connect dreams, prophecy, ESP, etc with a higher power, or with spiritual beliefs in any way as opposed to some scientific but unexplained phenomenon?

Function

I. Higher Power

A. Connection

1. To combat aloneness of being human.

feeling like someone will always be with you, not totally alone

2. Escape.

religion exists because people want to escape into paradise to escape oppression or discomfort

3. A way to avoid responsibility for own actions or need to act

concern that people who believe in a higher power are avoiding what is happening in their lives and their responsibility for it

4. Belief in a distant power as a way to reconcile that power and bad things happening to good people and vice versa, also to reconcile free will and higher power

B. Guides people into good, provides ideal, creates rules, morality

1. Provides ideal to strive towards, helps to resist bad things, sets a standard

2. Creates morality, because people will think of the judgment when they act

C. Control

1. General control needs

belief in a higher power gives sense of control over uncontrollable. it is important to believe things are not random, that they are happening for a reason, also that you can affect them, e.g. by praying

2. Just world hypothesis

people are punished for sins. knowing how to worship or appease the higher power ensures your justice.

3. Prayers

praying as a way to feel like you have control, have an impact on the outcome.

D. Fate/Meaning (this is related to idea of control)

there is a hidden meaning in life that a higher power knows or controls; things happen for a reason

II. Creation

Beliefs explain creation, what is unanswered by science

III. Soul

A. Meaning to death: has achieved the goal of the soul

B. Meaning to life: purpose in life, the soul has a goal

C. Explain differences in morality, personality, goodness

D. Something to live on, that does not die (see life after death)

IV. Life after death

A. Purpose, meaning (see fate/meaning under higher power above)

hope in meaning to life, not just death as end, purpose to become better person and to move on in some way

B. Just world hypothesis

after the suffering in this world, belief in a good place for those who you love; this gives comfort gives comfort, hope.

ensures justice for those who have acted wrongly

C. To ensure life continuing

difficult imagining not existing, a final end

D. Maintaining continued connection with loved ones who have died

connection with past people, and also connection with culture, tradition through this belief

V. Interaction between individuals

A. Meaning to relationships

certain relationships were meant to happen, or certain relationships are blessed

B. Connects people

religious beliefs bringing people together and acting as a balancing force against individualism, selfishness, anarchy, the personal and subjective capitalistic world.

VI. Fate

Gives meaning and purpose to events in life

VII. Supernatural Occurrences

Explains supernatural occurrences

Functions of Belief Systems

A. To justify or support power or judgments.

--this is especially true for beliefs that are very dogmatic, that create a close ingroup, and that include judging others outside of the ingroup.

--may fulfill a need for superiority or cover insecurity or fulfill a need to control others

--creates authority to follow with surety

B. Understanding/explanation

--this is a recurrent theme in many of the individual domains of function: higher power, creation, supernatural occurrences, life after death.

--it seems important to many people that they have an explanation for things that occur in their lives, as well as things that affect them less directly like the creation of the world.

C. Hope, in something better, in going on, in the goodness.

this seems to be related to the need to believe in a just world where good people are rewarded for goodness and evil is punished.

D. Organizes life, creates rules to follow and clear punishments/ reward

religious beliefs can provide morality and clear definitions of what is good and what is bad and how to live your life.

Influences

I. Upbringing

Whether religion is a part of your upbringing and how you have experienced these beliefs, as well as your general feelings about your upbringing, will affect your beliefs. also whether or not you have been encouraged to question and criticize authority.

II. Cultural mores, situation

A. Do others believe, do the current beliefs fit in with your life-view e.g. present view of God as more humanitarian, less authoritarian

B. Politics of churches exposed to, approach to politics and money

many people differentiate between structure of church and personal beliefs, but others say that their beliefs have been shaped by their exposure to positive or negative role models in organized religion

III. Scientism

A. The need for proof, and to what extent things need to be proven will affect beliefs. some say that science is the new religion

1B. Can science explain religious experiences and beliefs or supernatural occurrences: people use religious beliefs to explain what science doesn't but some turn it around and say science can eventually explain religion and make scientific hypotheses for religious phenomena.

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